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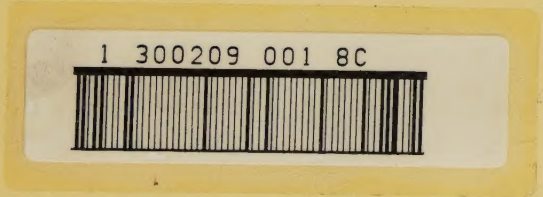
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A Short History of the British
Working Class Movement
1789–1848

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A Short History of the British Working Class Movement 1789-1927

by

G. D. H. Cole

Volume I. 1789–1848

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PREFACE

THE following study of the British Working-class Movement purports to be no more than an introductory survey of a field which needs much further research. There exist already full histories of the Trade Union Movement, by Mr. and Mrs. Webb, and of the Co-operative Movement, by G. J. Holyoake and by Benjamin Jones, as well as many excellent studies of particular phases and periods. But no one, to my knowledge, has attempted before to bring within a single book a general survey of the growth of the Working-class Movement in all its leading aspects, political as well as industrial and co-operative. As a teacher, I have long felt the want of such a book ; for the histories of separate phases of working-class activity fail to give just that synoptic view which seems to me essential for those who begin to study the subject. At a later stage, I hope to cover the ground far more adequately, and in a far larger book. But I venture to believe that this book as it is will be found useful, and to hope that it will encourage fellow-workers in this field to fill up by further research some of its obvious gaps and deficiencies.

Naturally, I owe a very great deal to writers who have studied, far more closely than I, particular branches of the subject—to Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, to Mr. and Mrs. Webb, to Mr. Max Beer, and to many others. They have done much to revive among British workers a knowledge of their own history, and thereby, I believe, to give them greater strength in facing the problems of the present. Nothing seems to me more important than this—that, as the working class grows towards the assumption of power, it should look back as well as forward, and shape its policy in the light of its own historic experience. Above all, I hope this book will serve a little to drive home the truth that the three great sections of the Working-class Movement—the Trade Unions, the Co-operative Societies, and the political organisations—are but three aspects of one single endeavour, deriving their strength from

a common necessity and a common inspiration, and, though their paths at times diverge, making for a common goal. The story recounted in this first volume is surely the plainest indication of this vital unity.

G. D. H. Cole.

Oxford, 1925.

NOTE.

In this new edition, I have made a few revisions in the light of criticism and further study. I have to thank those who have drawn my attention to points needing amendment.

G. D. H. C.

Oxford, 1927.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTORY	9
	1. Phases of Growth.	
	2. The Threshold of Industrialism.	
II.	THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION	21
	1. The Rise of Capitalism.	
	2. The Industrial Revolution.	
III.	THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN . .	41
IV.	WAR AND PEACE	53
	1. Trade Union Struggles—The Years of War.	
	2. Unemployment, Revolt and Repression.	
V.	SOCIALISM AND REFORM	77
	1. Socialist Origins.	
	2. The Repeal of the Combination Acts.	
	3. The Reform Movement.	
VI.	REVOLUTIONARY TRADES UNIONISM	103
	1. Trades Unionism—The Labourers' Revolt.	
	2. The Rise of Owenism.	
	3. The Operative Builders.	
	4. The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union	
VII.	CHARTISM TO 1839	131
	1. The New Poor Law.	
	2. The Rise of Chartism.	
	3. The Chartist Convention of 1839.	
	4. The Newport Rising.	
VIII.	CHARTISM—LATER PHASES	155
	1. The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League.	
	2. Chartism—1840 to 1842.	
	3. The Land Scheme—The Year of Revolutions.	
	4. The Dissolution of Chartism.	
IX.	THE CONDITION OF THE WORKERS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	175

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTORY

1. Phases of Growth
2. The Threshold of Industrialism

I

Phases of Growth

The "Industrial Revolution" is the name which historians give, not to any single event, but to the great process of economic change in the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. That process swiftly transformed England from a mainly agricultural country into the "workshop of the world." It tore up by the roots old social relationships and institutions which had seemed to be firmly established. It destroyed the old life of the village, and created the problem of the new factory town. It compelled Parliament to reform itself, and raised the middle classes to political power as well as affluence. And, last but not least, it created the modern wage-earning class—the proletariat which, nominally free, can live only by selling its labour for a wage.

In creating the proletariat, the Industrial Revolution gave birth to the Labour Movement. We can watch, during the last years of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, the gradual growth of a working-class point of view, and of organisations seeking to express that point of view. This is not to say that organisations of working people came into existence for the first time during the Industrial Revolution. Long before, there were Trade Unions and strikes, as well as Friendly Societies and other organisations consisting of manual workers. But until nearly the end of the eighteenth century these bodies seem to have had little contact one with another, and little consciousness of a community of view and interest. The sense of unity came only when the Industrial Revolution began to form all the workers in the common mould of the wage-system. The Industrial Revolution gave birth to the Labour Movement.

It will be seen that the Labour Movement, as I define it here, implies, in some degree, a community of outlook. It is an organisation, or, rather, many forms of organisation, based upon the sense of a common status and a common need for mutual help.

A Trade Union or a Co-operative Society is not, by the mere fact of its existence and adoption of a certain method, part of the Labour Movement. To-day no one would so call the " Trade Unions " of lawyers or doctors or the Army and Navy Co-operative Society. The term " movement " implies a common end or at least a community of purpose which is real, and influences men's thoughts and actions, even if it is imperfectly apprehended or largely unconscious.

Not in a day or a year do the scattered workers' organisations of the days before the Industrial Revolution give place to, or become, a movement clearly defined and conscious of its identity. We shall watch the change coming about stage by stage ; and we shall see at the end of this book that it is still by no means complete. We shall, however, find that there are certain points at which it seems to take sudden great leaps forward. One of these occurs after the Peace of 1815, which brought the long struggle with Napoleon finally to an end. Another is in the eighteen-eighties, when Socialism, as a material body of doctrine, first begins to exert a real influence in Great Britain. A third, perhaps, is found about the time of the Great War of 1914–1918.

This growth of a clearly articulated Labour Movement is, however, by no means a single continuous process. We can, indeed, usefully divide the whole history of the movement from the Industrial Revolution onwards into three broadly distinct phases. First comes a period which is chiefly one of revolt—a succession of uprisings, using different means and forms of organisation, against the new industrial conditions and new capitalist power in society. During this phase the movement is largely looking backwards, and kicking in vain against the pricks of a new system to which it feels an instinctive hostility. Up to the end of the first phase the wage-earner has not wholly ceased to be a peasant at heart. He responds most readily to leaders who, like William Cobbett, have their hearts in the country rather than the town. He is not so much seeking to control the new capitalist order, or to build up his position within it, as he is half-consciously seeking to destroy it, and to revert to the way of life from which he has been forcibly driven. The revolts of the Luddites, the strikes and machine-breakings of 1818, the Reform agitation, the " Last Labourers' Revolt " of 1831, the Owenite Trades Unionism of 1830–1834,

even the Chartist Movement, with its land schemes and its hostility to the Corn Law reformers, are all deeply penetrated with the hatred of the new industrialism. Right up to the collapse of Chartism in 1848 the Working-class Movement is still looking at least as much back as forward.

The second phase, stretching approximately from 1848 to the eighteen-eighties, is the period of acclimatisation to capitalism, and acceptance of industrialism as the basis of the social order. This explains its moderation. From revolting against Capitalism, the workers pass to the task of organising their forces within it. They build up stable Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, and begin to send a few workmen to represent their point of view in Parliament. In this period the Labour Movement, regarded as a complex of organisations, assumes something like its modern form. Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies are not so radically different in structure to-day from what they became during the middle years of the nineteenth century. But their objects have changed, or are changing ; for, during this period, the Working-class Movement, having made up its mind to accept Industrialism, is not yet strong enough to make an effective bid for its control. It can only fight for better wages and conditions, for recognition, and for the right to organise freely, and to build up its Unions and Co-operative Societies into strong protective bodies. It does not challenge Capitalism ; rather it accepts the Capitalist system, and tries to work within it for the improvement of the workers' lot. The alliance of Liberalism and Labour, a marked feature of the mid-Victorian compromise, is the clearest expression of this transitional period in the growth of the Working-class Movement.

The third phase, beginning in the eighteen-eighties, is marked by the emergence of Socialism as the creed of a growing body of workers. There accompany it, first, a great extension in the scope of Trade Unionism, which, for the first time since the collapse of 1834, begins to make an effective appeal to the poorer and less skilled grades of workers, and, secondly, the rise of Labour as an independent political force. Under Socialist influence, the exclusiveness of the Trade Union Movement is gradually broken down, and the idea of working-class unity finds practical expression in both industrial and political affairs. These tendencies, strongly

marked in the eighteen-nineties, suffer a temporary check in the early years of the twentieth century, but are soon again active, and remain active at the present time.

It may be that, when recent events have passed into clearer historical perspective, a new phase will be seen as beginning with the conditions created by the Russian Revolution and the World War. Certainly there is one marked difference between present and past movements of agitation in Great Britain. Hitherto British Labour, while it has had certain contacts with working-class movements abroad, has been, on the whole, exceedingly insular and self-centred. This attitude, of course, has not been peculiar to the Labour Movement ; it has been a fixed characteristic of British national policy. But now Great Britain, having largely lost her exclusive and privileged position as the centre of world finance and commerce, is becoming more and more involved in international complications, economic as well as political. This change in the national situation is reflected in a growing change in the attitude of Labour, which also is growing international under pressure of events, and is compelled in self-defence, and for the furtherance of its Socialist aims, to enter into much closer relations with the working-class movements of Continental countries. This tendency still provokes strong criticism, and it is too soon yet to pass a plain judgment upon it. But of its existence there is no doubt, and I, at any rate, regard it as a historic necessity in view of the changed conditions since the war.

While, therefore, the direct purpose of this book is to study the history of organised Labour in Great Britain, one must never leave out of account the fact that the working class, and therefore the Working-class Movement also, is essentially an international thing. It is world-wide, just as Capitalism is world-wide ; for, wherever Capitalism exists, a working class dependent on wages is necessary to its existence ; and this working class tends to feel the same need for common action against largely similar grievances, and the same aspirations towards a new order based on working-class control of the productive forces.

The modern Labour Movement, though its structure and policy differ from country to country, has thus, in all developed industrial countries, essentially the same form. This form is dictated to it by the conditions, everywhere fundamentally the same, which

have called it into being. It is the child of modern Capitalism out of Industrial Revolution, and its essential basis is the modern class of wage-workers—the proletariat—among whom it arises as the expression of an essential community of class, interest and experience. Its most universal and spontaneous form is the Trade Union—the association of wage-workers for the protection and improvement of the standard of life.

Until there are Trade Unions, there is no Labour Movement. Radical, and even revolutionary organisations, largely supported by wage-earners, may exist without Trade Unions. Socialist and Communist *theories* may arise without Trade Unions. But the Labour Movement cannot exist without them, because they are the schools in which the workers learn the lesson of self-reliance and solidarity.

Trade Unions are, then, historically, the first form of distinct working-class organisation, as something different from the participation of workers in agitations led by other classes and expressing the ideas of other classes. They are, and they remain, the essential basis of the Working-class Movement.

As the movement grows it passes through a process of differentiation. As the wage-workers develop their common consciousness, they create (at first without wholly throwing off their allegiance to organisations led by other classes) political and propagandist bodies of their own, for the dissemination of working-class doctrines and the conduct of working-class political agitation. Among these bodies Socialism gradually develops as a coherent working-class gospel. Labour and Socialist Parties, Socialist and Communist societies, arise in many countries, and gradually establish international relationships. Sometimes these political and propagandist bodies are based structurally upon, or intimately linked up with, the Trade Unions. Sometimes there is no, or only a very weak, apparent link between them. But, whatever the formal structure may be, in reality working-class political organisation is essentially dependent on Trade Unionism.

In most countries there grows up, side by side with the industrial, parliamentary and Socialist organisations, a separate organisation for the purpose of mutual trade. Co-operation, like Trade Unionism, is a movement arising spontaneously among the workers for their mutual protection. It assumes many forms ; but

its most universal is the grouping of the workers, as consumers, for the common purchase of the elementary needs of life. Co-operation is not, like Trade Unionism, confined by its very nature to those who are employed at a wage or salary. It can be useful also to peasants, to the small middle class. But it remains fundamentally a working-class movement, drawing its strength and coherence from the class which has learnt, through the conditions of its every-day employment, the lesson of combination. Its less-clearly-marked-off circle of patrons and its necessary engrossment in trading success tend to make Co-operation pursue, to some extent, an independent course of its own, and weaken the links between it and the industrial and political organisations of Labour. But it arises, in truth, from the same needs and aspirations ; and, as these come to be more clearly understood, the unity of all these forms of working-class organisation is also seen to be necessary. The history of Co-operation is an essential part of the story of British Labour.

Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, political parties and Socialist organisations—these together make up the modern Working-class Movement. They are, at bottom, not three or four movements, but one and indivisible ; for they arise out of a common need, and depend upon one and the same class, whose ideas and aspirations they seek from their different standpoints to express. In this book I shall be telling the story of their growth and differentiation—of the soil in which they grow, the stages of growth by which they have come to their present forms, the ideas which they have embodied. The story will be of Labour in Great Britain—the country in which modern Capitalism first emerged to full growth—the country which was, therefore, the pioneer of Labour organisation. But, though the details are different, the essentials are in other countries much the same. There are differences arising from causes historical and economic. The condition of the various national Labour Movements differs with the degree of industrialisation of each country, with the greater or less importance of agriculture and the peasantry, and with a hundred other things in which the nations are unlike. But to-day, everywhere save in Russia, where the seizure of political authority has created new conditions, the structure and purpose of the Labour Movement are much the same, whatever may be the variations in degree

of development or strength of organisation. America has no national Labour Party and only the germ of a Co-operative Movement, and her Trade Unions are still at a stage of growth which the other countries have left behind. But even so big a difference as this is of stage rather than of quality. Labour in America is, on the whole, moving along the road which Labour in Europe has trodden already. As there are not really three or four separate movements in one country, but one movement, so International Labour really makes up a single movement, feeling, feebly as yet, for the means of international solidarity. The reason for this underlying unity will, I hope, be made clear in this book. There is but one Capitalist system : out of it springs but one Labour Movement.

II

The Threshold of Industrialism

There were, we have seen, Trade Unions and strikes long before there was a Labour Movement. Trade Unions and temporary combinations of wage-earners to raise wages or to prevent their reduction were common in the earlier eighteenth century, and even long before then. Many instances of combination can be found even in the Middle Ages ; and these become more frequent with the advance of commerce and industry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But these early combinations did not create a Labour Movement ; there was behind them no common idea of the solidarity of the whole working class, and no thought of creating a new social order based on collective control.

Nor did the rise of a Labour Movement follow immediately upon the beginnings of Capitalism. Capitalist enterprise, and especially Capitalist trading, existed long before the Industrial Revolution, and was, indeed, the essential basis of that Revolution. But not until capital was widely applied to large-scale production under factory conditions did it engender the massed discontents out of which the Labour Movement arose.

The Industrial Revolution, which is thus the real starting-point of the story of organised Labour, is generally said to have taken place in this country between about 1760 and 1830. The dates are arbitrary ; for no one outstanding event marks the beginning or end of the Revolution. But they are convenient as indicating roughly the period during which took place the great transformation of Great Britain from a predominantly agricultural country into the " workshop of the world." The corresponding changes came, for the most part, later in other countries. Because of her island situation, her development of colonies and overseas trade, and her immunity from internal wars in the earlier eighteenth century, Great Britain took the lead in the creation of modern industrialism.

In order to understand how the Labour Movement arose, and how this great transformation took place, it is necessary to understand in outline the preceding conditions and the factors making both for the accumulation of wealth and for the creation of the vast mass of factory labour necessary for the growth of the new industrial system. If the exploitation of steam and machinery would have been impossible without an accumulation of capital ready for devotion to its use, this capital would have been useless without a supply of wage-labour ready for employment. Indeed, it is clear that the supply of labour was the most vital necessity; for, when once the processes of power production had been set in motion, the wage-workers themselves provided the means for their rapid expansion. In other words, the beating down of wages, the long hours of work, and the exploitation of child-labour, which marked the period of the Industrial Revolution, became the means to the extraordinarily swift accumulation of capital which enabled the Revolution to proceed with ever-increasing velocity.

We must, therefore, begin our study with a brief survey of the developments which led up to the Industrial Revolution. We must inquire what were the causes which led men, in the earlier eighteenth century, to devote their energies to the means of increasing the production of commodities and so stimulated the great inventions which were the technical basis of the new economic system.

We must inquire what stage had been reached in the development of Capitalism before the coming of these technical changes; how wealth had been accumulated; and what was the condition of the "lower orders" in the days before the Industrial Revolution.

We must inquire—and this is the most important inquiry of all—whence came the supply of labour for the new factories, and the vast increase of population which accompanied the change? Who were the factory workers? Whence did they come? And what forces impelled them to seek their living in the noisome towns which grew up in the industrial districts, and to submit to the overwork and oppression of the new economic system?

So much preliminary clearing of the ground may appear to some readers too discursive. My object, however, is not to write a detailed history of the Labour Movement, but to give a historical

interpretation of its leading phases. Origins do not explain developments ; but developed movements cannot be understood without a knowledge of their origins. To begin with an unprefaced account of the Labour Movement itself would be to countenance the theory of spontaneous generation, to show it springing causeless from the head of Time. Its rise was not causeless ; and they who would understand it must understand the causes of its origin as well as of its later growth.

CHAPTER II. THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

1. The Rise of Capitalism
2. The Industrial Revolution

I

The Rise of Capitalism

The characteristic form of industrial organisation in the mediæval towns was the localised Gild. The Gild was, in essence, a combination of master-craftsmen (or master-merchants) for the regulation and government of the trade. It usually included journeymen as well as masters ; but it must not be conceived as a joint body bringing together two distinct classes. The Gild trinity of masters, journeymen and apprentices stood, at first, rather for three stages in the life of the same individuals than for a distinction of class. In theory, at least, the sole entry to the Gild was by way of apprenticeship. In due course the apprentice became a journeyman, and thereafter in time he hoped to become a master. Mastership was the completion of the process, and the government of the Gild was vested in the masters as the embodiment of this completion. The Gild was thus essentially different from either an employer's association or a Trade Union, or a joint body representing employers and employed. It was based on the assumption—at one time a true assumption in many trades —that, in due course, all good journeymen would have the chance of becoming masters.

This theory was never fully realised in fact. And it was realised less and less as time went on. Although the Gilds laid down elaborate regulations restricting the number of journeymen any master might employ, in order to prevent large-scale organisation and undue inequality of wealth from arising among their numbers, no restrictions did in fact prevent the rise of inequality. This first appeared in a marked form chiefly among the Gild masters engaged in trade and commerce. It was difficult to expand industrial enterprise without directly employing a large number of workers ; but a small staff engaged in merchant operations was capable of handling a relatively large turnover. Also, commerce was, in those days, mainly in luxury goods, which were expensive and

realised a large surplus for the merchant, who had also the advantage of handling a far greater amount of silver and gold than came the way of the master-craftsman.

Thus the accumulation of capital took place chiefly in the hands of masters engaged in trade and commerce. As communications improved and political conditions became more settled in the later Middle Ages, there was a big growth of commercial enterprise. Economically, and also politically, the local self-sufficiency of earlier times began to give place to national organisation. " National economy," as it has been called, replaced the " town economy " of the Middle Ages. The scale of commercial enterprise increased ; and larger fortunes began to be gathered into single hands.

The mediæval Gild system, based essentially on the local unit of the town and on the assumption of approximate equality among the masters, broke down under the impact of the new conditions. Gild restrictions were felt more and more to be a burden as the opportunities for money-making increased. Greater and greater inequality between masters began to be tolerated within the Gilds. What had once been an association of equals turned by stages into a hierarchical body, in which the richer members acquired a vested right to control. The road to promotion became narrower as entrance fees and dues were increased, and mastership limited or preference given to the sons of masters. Among the masters themselves inequality became more and more pronounced, and led to a new differentiation of class between great and small. A " Livery " of the richer masters acquired special privileges, and the smaller masters, as well as the journeymen, were often shut out of all real share in the government of the Gilds. Moreover, some whole Gilds became subordinated to others more favourably situated for access to the supply of material or to the market. Many master-craftsmen were reduced, in fact, to the position of sub-contractors and half-assimilated to the working journeymen, most of whom could no longer hope to become Gild masters at all.

Under pressure of these conditions, industry, hitherto confined almost wholly to the corporate towns, began to develop in the suburbs, market towns and country districts outside the jurisdiction of the Gilds, which commonly had authority only in the areas under municipal control. Demand was expanding, and the

journeyman to whom the Gild denied mastership, or the small master whom it threatened to crush, saw prospects of better fortune in an area where he could try his hand untrammelled by Gild laws or restrictions. It often suited the merchants, who wanted a growing supply of cheap commodities, to deal with these suburban and country producers, and to foster the growth of industry outside the corporate towns. And new classes of middlemen, such as the clothiers, grew up, to act as intermediaries between the scattered producers and the merchants of the great towns and ports.

The Protestant Reformation, which threw overboard mediæval doctrines hostile to "usury," and fostered individualism in economic as well as political affairs, was, in part, a result of changes already in progress, and in part a great stimulus to their further development. Puritanism especially, with its belief in abstinence and its insistence on simplicity of living, was a powerful factor in promoting the accumulation of capital. Where his ancestor had spent on enjoyments, pageants and religious observances, the Puritan saved. And what he saved bred more.

Thus in the seventeenth century the Gild system, though it existed still, was in decay, and had largely both lost its monopoly of production and adapted its methods to the new conditions. It had become markedly oligarchical, with power concentrated in the hands of the richer masters. The journeymen had no longer any share at all in its control, though they still received in many cases certain friendly benefits from it. There are in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many records of attempted combinations by the journeymen, outside the Gilds, in order to enforce better pay and conditions, and many attempts by the Gilds to suppress these, either directly or with the help of Parliament. These independent attempts at combination, rather than the Gilds themselves, are to be regarded as the forerunners of Trade Unionism.

The Civil War of the seventeenth century to some extent held back the growth of Capitalism. One of the issues which accentuated the quarrel between Parliament and Crown was the objection of the Commons to the Crown's power, often abused in order to raise revenue, of granting patents and monopoly rights in the control of certain trades. The victory of the Parliament carried

with it the victory of the trading interests, as the commercial legislation of the Commonwealth plainly shows. Nor did the Restoration undo the traders' victory; the new settlement of England, confirmed by the Revolution of 1688, was based on the alliance of merchants and landowners in their common interest. The landed class retained political power, but it was essential to the settlement that this power should be used in the interests of trade. This was clearly recognised by the statesmen of the Restoration and the Revolution.

The end of the seventeeth century and the early part of the eighteenth were a period of great commercial expansion. Dutch commerce was still prosperous; but the Dutch maritime power had waned and was passing into British hands. The wars with France expressed a deep-seated commercial rivalry. British sea-power, following up the voyagings of the sixteenth and the early colonisings of the seventeenth century, pushed British commerce far to East and West. The India trade grew fast, and was accompanied by the gradual conquest of the privileged East India Company. The British colonies in North America waxed important as sources of supply, and especially as inexhaustible stores of timber for shipbuilding. Trade with the West Indies and South America developed rapidly. Ships increased in size, carrying capacity, seaworthiness and speed.

Fortunes were made fast out of the growth of enterprise. The end of the seventeenth century brought with it the beginnings of the National Debt and the foundation of the Bank of England—both directly products of the State's needs in the financing of the French wars, but both also powerful instruments for the development of Capitalism. After the wars, a long spell of peace enabled trade to increase still more rapidly. Crises, like the famous bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720, only marked the rapid accumulation of wealth available for investment. Landed gentry and traders alike waxed fat on the proceeds of commercial prosperity.

There was, moreover, a progressive intermingling of these classes. The gentry largely increased their fortunes by marrying into trade. Successful merchants bought landed estates or, by buying the farms of a number of yeomen, carved new great estates out of the land of England. Retired " nabobs " from India, or

merchants from America, settled down as squires and Parliament men in the " Old Country."

The close alliance of landowners and business men during the earlier eighteenth century was based on a close community of interest. The great industry of England, up to the days of the Industrial Revolution, was the woollen industry. As this industry expanded the demand for raw wool, of course, steadily increased. But wool was a product of British agriculture—for in those days the import of wool from abroad was quite small. A brisk demand for wool was an assurance of profit to the landowner ; for the grazier, getting a good price for his wool, could afford to pay a good rent for land. The landowners' Parliament was therefore always ready to give legislative protection to the woollen industry, as long as it assured a good market for the products of the land. The merchants and clothiers, on their side, had no desire to upset the political control of the landowners, as long as they were given this protection, and as long as the English aristocracy maintained an open door to the successful man of business. This open door, in contrast with the closed aristocracy of France, was the secret of the British oligarchical system. Not till the new industrial employers came knocking in throngs at the gates of political power did " Reform " become practical politics. And then, where France had a Revolution, England had only a moderate measure of Parliamentary Reform.

In the eighteenth century, the growth of the woollen industry, and the general expansion of trade and wealth due to trade, steadily made land dearer and more profitable to its owners. The desire of merchants to buy land, and with it a share in social prestige and political power, also helped to enhance the value of landed property. The demand for cereals and meat grew, even faster than the demand for wool, with the rise in the standard of comfort which accompanied the economic expansion.

Thus was set on foot a powerful movement towards the concentration of land ownership and the exploitation of land as a source of profit. The Enclosure Movement, which reached its greatest intensity in the latter part of the eighteenth century, was already making rapid strides in its earlier years. At first, farms were thrown together and waste lands enclosed in order to provide more profitable units for stock-rearing or arable cultivation. Then

the ancient system of land-holding in the villages was attacked, as putting fatal obstacles in the way of progressive farming.

The land of England up to this time was still largely, though not everywhere, cultivated under the old system of the common fields. Each owner or customary tenant had his holdings in scattered strips here and there in the fields common to the village. Each had his pasture rights both on the fields and on the uncultivated commons. In addition, many villagers, who had no land holding of their own, or only a tiny holding attached to a cottage, exercised rights of common, recognised, or half-recognised, by law and custom, over the waste lands.

This system, standing firmly in the way of scientific agriculture, was now attacked and overthrown. A high return for the application of capital to the land, either in the form of drainage or clearance, or of stocking with extensive herds or flocks, could be got only when holdings could be concentrated and enclosed. Enclosure of the open fields became the necessary completion of capitalist agriculture and of the high rents which the capitalist farmer could afford to pay. Hence the swift extension of the Enclosure Movement during the eighteenth century. Between 1700 and 1760 we have records of over 200 Enclosure Acts and over 300,000 acres enclosed ; between 1761 and 1800 of 2,000 Acts and over 2,000,000 acres enclosed ; and in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century of 2,000,000 more acres and nearly 2,000 more Enclosure Acts.

The story of the fearful hardships caused to the poor by this Agricultural Revolution has been often told. Its effect was a wholesale dispossession of the rural population ; for, among the peasantry, even those who were granted some land in compensation for their lost rights were, in very many cases, given it under conditions which they could not fulfil. The land had to be fenced, and often drained ; and the peasant, lacking the capital to do this, had often to sell his share to the larger owners for an old song. Moreover, many, who had held no land in the old village, but only common rights attached to a cottage, lost their means of life without any compensation at all. The cow, or the pig, or the geese, could no longer be left to pick up their keep on the common ; for the common, as well as the open fields, had passed into unrestricted private ownership and enclosure.

The mass of the peasantry therefore, even when they remained in the villages, were reduced to the status of wage-labourers. Moreover, two other factors contributed to press down their status still further. The new agricultural methods, based on larger holdings, required far less labour to the acre than the old. This was true pre-eminently of sheep-farming ; but it applied, in less degree, to arable farming as well. The Enclosure Movement thus produced at once a large surplus of agricultural workers, and this contributed to the depression of agricultural wages and accentuated the loss caused by the disappearance of auxiliary sources of income, such as rights of common.

The second factor, of no less fundamental importance, arose, not directly out of the Enclosures, but out of the parallel revolution in industry. The expansion of the woollen industry in the earlier eighteenth century had led to a great advance of what is usually called the " domestic system." Spinning and weaving were chiefly carried on, not in factories or workshops owned by a capitalist employer, but in the homes of the peasants, or in small workshops attached to them, throughout the wool-producing districts. The system differed from place to place, and Capitalism had developed further in the Western Counties than in Yorkshire, or the Midlands, or the East. But, generally speaking, the function of the capitalist in the woollen industry remained that of merchanting and trading rather than the direct control or oversight of production. The capitalist clothier bought the yarn from the spinner and sold it to the weaver, from whom again he bought the woven stuff. Sometimes, and increasingly, he bought the raw wool and sold it to the spinner ; and, in the West Country, he often retained ownership of the material throughout, giving it out, in turn, to spinner and weaver to convert into yarn or stuff at a piece-work price. But, save in the finishing processes, such as bleaching and dyeing, which required abundant water and a larger application of capital in order to secure the best return, and were, therefore, more and more brought direct under capitalist control, the productive workers remained, for the most part, isolated and semi-independent producers, working under their own control in their own homes. Until power-driven machinery came to be applied, there was no economic advantage in concentrating production under a single roof. It suited the capitalist

better to remain a trader, and to leave the control of the productive processes in the hands of the producers themselves.

Under this system a great cottage industry grew up over the greater part of the country. Spinning often, and weaving sometimes, were combined with small-scale agriculture by the same household. All members of the family worked at the various processes, and combined their industrial occupations with work on the land. When the one was slack they turned to the other, thus minimising the effect both of seasonal variations and of the ups and downs of trade. The peasant and the industrial worker were not two distinct classes, but largely one and the same. The purely urban workers, skilled craftsmen or operatives in the few factory trades, were an insignificant minority of the whole population. London was the only really big city. Gregory King, in his estimate of the occupations of the people at the end of the seventeenth century, puts the total number of artisans, including their wives and children, at only 240,000, out of a population of 5,674,000, or 4·2 per cent.

As trade and production expanded during the eighteenth century, the class of town workers, of course, expanded too. But the bulk of the increase went to swell the ranks of the domestic producers, and to add to the amount of their industrial earnings. Expanding production, under the old system, meant a rise in the standard of life for the domestic producers.

The twin revolutions in industry and agriculture destroyed the basis of this growing prosperity. The peasant, depending partly on his industrial earnings and partly on his income from the land, found the latter either greatly reduced or wholly taken away by the Enclosure Movement. At the same time, or rather beginning later, but then proceeding with rapid parallel strides, came the Industrial Revolution. Power-driven machinery began to compete with handicraft, reducing the cost of production with extraordinary speed. Cotton, a cheaper substitute, to which the new machines were first extensively applied, began to oust wool from its predominant position. The peasant worker could not stand up to the machine. His earnings dwindled fast ; he was thrust more and more into the position of a residuary producer, and given only what work was left to do when the machines were fully employed. The burden of trade fluctuations fell even more

heavily upon him ; and he could no longer turn to agriculture as an alternative occupation—for there, too, his services were no longer needed. The agricultural workers migrated, perforce, in their thousands to the new industrial districts, to seek work in the hated factories. But there remained behind in the countryside enough to scramble helplessly for jobs, and bring down still further the standard of real wages in agriculture.

The long war with France between 1793 and 1815 greatly accentuated the evils attending this double economic revolution. It led to a huge rise and to rapid fluctuations of prices, to which wages were slow to readjust themselves. It dislocated markets, and caused extreme fluctuations in the demand for industrial labour. It hugely stimulated agricultural production, and left behind it in the countryside an inevitably aftermath of depression and readjustment. Above all, it put into the hearts of the rich a panic fear of the poor. Fearful that the English people might follow the revolutionary example of the French, the richer classes became callous to the sufferings of the poor, and far less inclined to remedy even the most glaring abuses of the new economic order than to treat the cries of suffering as dangerous signs of popular disaffection. Thus the hardships of the economic revolution were made far worse by the political troubles of the time. Patriotism became a cloak for exploitation of unprecedented severity ; anti-Jacobinism was used to cover a multitude of sins.

Under these conditions the modern proletariat came to birth. Out of these conditions sprang the Labour Movement.

II

The Industrial Revolution

In the light of the preceding section, what is called the " Industrial Revolution " appears as the culmination of a long process of economic development. We are apt to think of it as the almost personal achievement of a group of brilliant scientists, inventors, and business men, who, after long ages of groping, suddenly found the means of harnessing and developing the forces of Nature so as to produce wealth in abundance thitherto unimagined. Genius doubtless played its part ; but, if the analysis given in the foregoing chapter is right, the inventors and exploiters of the new machines were themselves rather products than producers of the new conditions. The inventor might invent in vain until the world was ready for his invention. Or, rather, it would be true to say that, in the realm of applied chemistry and applied mechanics, which made the greatest contributions to the transformation of industry, the inventor seldom invents at all save under the stimulus of a strong demand for his invention. Many of the principles on which the new inventions were based were known to learned men for centuries before the Industrial Revolution ; but they were not applied to industry because the incentive to apply them was lacking. When conditions were ripe—when wide new markets were being opened up and a supply of wage-labour being made available—the great technical inventions came about as a matter of course.

This view of the Industrial Revolution is borne out by the fact that there is hardly a single invention of this period that can be confidently attributed to a single author. Watt did not invent the steam-engine or Stephenson the locomotive : they both improved on previous models and made them more suitable for industrial use. Almost every one of the great textile inventions is of disputed authorship ; it is to this day very doubtful whether Richard Arkwright, the most famous innovator in the cotton

trade, ever really invented anything at all. Most of the discoveries were made, not by great geniuses working from first principles, but by ordinary people experimenting on the basis of their predecessors' work. Inventions were so many and so great because the rapidly expanding markets and prospects of profitable production set many minds to work on the problem of increasing the output of commodities, and making labour more productive.

Only a very few outstanding instances need be given in order to make this point plain. In domestic industry on a family basis, children could spin but could not weave. The family supply of yarn tended to outrun the capacity of the weaver to make it into cloth. There was need for a speedier process of weaving. Kay's flying shuttle (1733) not merely met the need, but caused the weaver to outrun the supply of yarn. Inventive minds turned to the problem of spinning; and the new machines of Hargreaves and Arkwright again reversed the position. The evolution of the power-loom, and further improvements in the spinning processes, at last established equilibrium early in the nineteenth century.

Again, the demand for coal caused a need for deeper mine-workings. The engines of Newcomen and Watt were the response. But more coal could not be hauled over the bad roads or taken by the inadequate waterways. New roads, canals, finally locomotives, met the need. It is true that each of these inventions had results far transcending the immediate want it was designed to meet; but the mother of each invention was economic necessity. The Industrial Revolution is not explained by the great inventions. The inventions have themselves to be explained by the economic situation.

This is not the place for any technical account of the inventions or of the new productive methods to which they gave rise. It is enough here to point out briefly their effects on the situation of the workers. This was threefold. In the first place they greatly increased the productivity of labour, so that vastly greater markets were required to afford employment to the same number of persons. They did not necessarily cause unemployment, save on their first introduction; but they made the maintenance of employment depend on the ability to secure an ever-widening market.

In the second place, they largely undermined the position of the

skilled workers, much of whose work could now be done by machines operated by unskilled women or children. They thus called into employment a large competing supply of labour which, having less power of resistance or a lower standard of life, was used both to beat down wages and to extend the hours of labour to an inhuman length. Children were worked, in many cases, as much as sixteen hours a day, and twelve hours became the lowest standard recognised under the new system.

Thirdly, the machine revolutionised the actual methods of production. Power-driven machinery cannot be operated economically by scattered workers. Water power, and, much more, steam power, demand the concentration of labour in factories. Moreover, power and machinery first made "overheads" an important element in the cost of production. The cost of power must be spread over the greatest possible quantity of labour; the machine, which costs money, must earn its keep by being kept fully in use. Therefore the workers are not only congregated in factories, but also speeded up, and worked hard and long, in order that the machines and the power may achieve their maximum utility. The productivity of labour is increased not only in proportion to the greater efficiency of the machine, but also in proportion to the greater incentive to use it to the full. In Marx's phrase, not only the productivity, but also the intensity, of labour grows greater.

The power to produce vastly more goods thus becomes, under the conditions of the Industrial Revolution, a means, not to the lightening of labour, but to a great increase in its severity. The price of the goods made by machinery certainly fell very fast; but the cost of living did not fall, both because agricultural production could not be increased in anything like the same measure as factory production, and because, after the outbreak of the war with France in 1793, war demands and inflation caused a rapid rise of prices, especially for foodstuffs. Wages, meanwhile, wholly failed to keep pace with the rapid changes in the purchasing power of money.

Despite these adverse conditions of the new factory system, the workers might have made better headway and maintained better their standard of life had not the supply of labour increased by leaps and bounds. During the eighteenth century there was,

according to all authorities, a great increase in the rate of growth of population. The first census was not taken until 1801, and no accurate figures exist for earlier times. But, though estimates differ, they agree on this point. Between 1500 and 1600, and again between 1600 and 1700, the growth of population did not exceed a million in the century. Between 1700 and 1800 the increase was nearer three millions, and between 1801 and 1831 another five millions were added. These figures, moreover, are for England and Wales alone. Thus, to the greater productivity of the individual worker, to the greater intensity of labour, and to the increased industrial employment of women and young children, was added a most powerful fresh factor—the immensely rapid increase of population.

Now, population is influenced by three factors—birth rates, death rates, and migration. And, with respect to all three, we are sadly hindered by lack of exact knowledge from forming accurate estimates of their effects. There seems, however, to be little doubt that migration, while it counted for something, was the least important factor, and that the decline in death rates, and, above all, in the rate of infant mortality was the most important. The large immigration into Great Britain from Ireland certainly far more than balanced the emigration, chiefly directed towards the New World; but this balance was no more than a small factor in the general increase.

Falling death rates were almost certainly, in the period from the mid-eighteenth century to about 1815, the decisive factor. For during this period there seems to be little doubt that better sanitary provision and increasing medical knowledge were steadily increasing the expectation of life. Up to the Napoleonic Wars a rising standard of living was also certainly contributing to a fall in the death rates, and even when the standard fell in the bad years during the war, the Speenhamland system prevented the fall from causing a rise in the death rate. It seems possible that, up to about 1815, the entire increase in population, apart from a very small part due to migration, can be explained by the falling death rates, and, above all, by the improved prospects of infant life.

This seems at first sight to contradict flatly the generally received view that the period of the Industrial Revolution was

one of increasing misery for the workers. But it does not really contradict it at all. Even in 1815 the factory system was still in its infancy, and the rise of the modern factory town was only beginning. The really swift transformation of industry to a factory basis was brought about in the decades immediately following Waterloo ; and it seems clear that at this point the fall in the death rates was sharply checked, as the appalling sanitary problems of the new factory towns altogether outran the capacity of the sanitary reformers and doctors to cope with them. We must look for the real social effects of the Industrial Revolution after, and not before, 1815.

Yet even these terrible conditions did not pull back the death rates to the point at which they had stood in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. The adult's expectation of life was probably shortened by urban conditions ; but the fall in the infant mortality rate, thanks to medical knowledge, was permanent. It is, however, impossible to explain the rise of population after 1815 purely, or even mainly, in terms of death rates. Conditions after 1815 were not getting better in these respects. It seems, therefore, reasonably probable that at this point a rising birth rate became a really important factor in causing population to increase.

Why, under these apparently adverse conditions, did population increase with unprecedented rapidity ? An explanation is often given purely in terms of conscious motive. The Industrial Revolution created a great new demand for child labour in the textile factories. Often the children could find work, at exceedingly low wages, when the father could find none. There was thus, in the factory districts, an economic motive for increasing the size of the family. Moreover, in the country, from 1795 onwards, Poor Law relief was being given on the " Speenhamland " system, under which inadequate wages were made up to a bare living standard according to the size of the family. More children meant increased poor relief. The agricultural labourers also had thus an economic motive for increased fertility.

Both these causes doubtless counted ; but it is very doubtful whether, even after 1815, they were the most powerful factors in stimulating the growth of population. Through the greater part of human history, population has been kept in check mainly by custom, and has remained relatively stable. But throughout the

world the past 150 years have brought a great increase. In countries which have developed "great industry," the change from agricultural to industrial methods has been commonly accompanied by a big growth of population, even where the economic motives just described have not been at work, or have been far less powerful. It is at least plausible to put forward as the reason for this growth, not so much any conscious adaptation of the size of the family to economic opportunities, as the withdrawal or destruction of institutions and customs tending to limitation.

The peasants, during the Industrial Revolution, were torn from the land, and driven to live in the noisome factory towns. Even where they remained in the country the old life of the village was destroyed and the old customs were broken up. The result was a breakdown of the largely unconscious checks on population which had existed under the old system. Men married sooner, and there was no custom or idea of a customary standard to restrain the indefinite multiplication of the people.

Thus, despite starvation wages and evil sanitary conditions, population grew faster and faster, piling up in the new towns and industrial districts as economic pressure drove the labourers out of the villages. The geographical distribution, as well as the number of the people, was radically altered. In 1700 the areas of greatest population were in the west and the south Midlands. As the century advanced, population shifted northwards into Lancashire and Yorkshire and the coalfields of the north-east coast. Towns such as Manchester grew by leaps and bounds. In 1770 Manchester and Salford, with their suburbs, had, perhaps, a population of 40,000. In 1801 this had risen to nearly 95,000; and in 1831 to nearly 238,000. Glasgow, Birmingham, and other great manufacturing centres underwent a similarly swift expansion.

It was this sudden leap forward in the growth of population that caused Malthus, as early as 1798, to frame his famous theory, which, in a vulgarised form, dominated orthodox economic thinking for a whole generation. Malthus saw, in the unrestricted growth of the people, the danger of a pressure on the means of subsistence which would make impossible any rise in the standard of life beyond the barest subsistence level, and might easily pull up the whole social system by the roots. Whether it was true or false, his teaching produced disastrous results on the attitude of

the rich towards the poor. Every child born in a workman's household came to appear as part of the universal menace—as an unwelcome fresh mouth to be fed. Instead of inquiring into the causes of the growth of population, and so devising fundamental remedies, statesmen and economists tried rather to prevent the poor from breeding by forcible deterrents. The new Poor Law of 1834, with its withdrawal of outdoor relief to the able-bodied, and its segregation of the sexes in the workhouse, was the embodiment of that popular "Malthusianism" which became the scientific cloak for the rich man's fear of his poor neighbour.

However rapidly population may increase, or change its location, these processes are bound to take some time. From the standpoint of the supply of labour the Industrial Revolution falls into two phases. During the earlier phase, extending to about 1800, there is a surplus of workers, owing to enclosures, in the country, but often a shortage in the factory districts. Migration has not yet taken place on a sufficient scale. This is the period during which occurs one of the worst, and most often described, abuses of the Revolution—the employment of "parish apprentices" in the factories, virtually as bond-slaves of the factory owner. The "parish apprentice" is a child who has fallen, owing to the destitution of its parents, into the hands of the Poor Law authorities. These, eager to rid themselves of the burden of the child's maintenance, virtually sell it, under indentures for a period of years, to the factory owner, who is experiencing a shortage of labour for the running of the new machines. The owner works the child what hours he pleases, and makes for its upbringing and education only what provision he pleases. The Poor Law, having got rid of the burden, washes its hands of the whole affair. Doubtless a few masters, like David Dale at New Lanark, treated these unfortunate children fairly well according to the low standards of the time. But most employers did not, justifying excessive hours and evil conditions on plea of the intensity of trade competition. This was the situation which Sir Robert Peel the elder, himself a big factory owner, meant his Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, passed in 1801, to do something to ameliorate.

But by 1801 the system of "parish apprentices" was already beginning to die a natural death. The Industrial Revolution, in

consequence of the growth and migration of the people, had entered on its second phase, and the supply of labour had already caught up the needs even of the swiftly expanding industries. It no longer paid to employ " parish apprentices " when cheap child labour could be had for the asking in the factory districts. The serious decline in the position of the adult workers set in at this point. There was a scramble for jobs, and adults were increasingly displaced by their own children. Naturally, the standard of living fell.

These highly adverse conditions were made much worse by the commercial uncertainties due to war. From 1793 to 1815, with only a brief interval in 1801 and 1802, Great Britain was engaged in its struggle with France. This did not prevent trade from expanding, and it even helped greatly the growth of the industries directly ministering to war requirements. But it caused great uncertainty and fluctuation in the textile industries, especially during its latter years, when, first, the war of blockade between Great Britain and Napoleon, waged by means of the Berlin Decrees and the Orders in Council (1806–7), seriously dislocated British trade with Europe, and then the war between Great Britain and America (1812–1814) affected both markets for finished goods and the supply of materials for the cotton factories of the north. The long war caused great destruction of wealth and great fluctuation of employment ; and, by draining away money for the prosecution of the war and the enrichment of those who made fortunes out of contracting and stock-jobbing, forced down the working-class standard of living to the lowest possible point.

The period of the Napoleonic wars, and of the economic crises which succeeded it, is the blackest chapter in the whole history of the British working class. Driven from the land by enclosures, made redundant or exposed to the competition of child-labour by the new machines, exposed to relentless persecution because of the fears engendered in the mind of the governing classes, both by their misery and by the " awful portent " of the Revolution in France, and enwalled in the hideous, stinking purlieus of the new factory towns, the workers underwent a long agony, from which they emerged at length, exhausted and docile, into the Victorian era. In this age of misery, and as the child of this misery, the British Labour Movement was born.

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CHAPTER III

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION IN GREAT BRITAIN

The French Revolution in Great Britain

The outstanding event of English, as well as of French, history in the eighteenth century was the French Revolution. When the people of Paris captured the Bastille ; when the peasants took the land of France ; when, at length, the monarchy gave place to the republic, the change was not one affecting a single country alone. For France had been the head and forefront of the European State system, and the fall of the French monarchy and the French nobility threatened every dynasty and every aristocracy in Europe. The peasants seized the land of France, and burnt the title-deeds of the nobles just when the English peasantry were being successfully dispossessed of the land of England. Republicanism triumphed in France ; and all the governing classes of Europe trembled, for none knew when his turn would come. " Liberty, equality, and fraternity," echoed menacingly over the world as the watchword of a new era.

In England the ruling classes were, on the whole, slower to respond to the challenge of the Revolution than elsewhere in Europe ; for the most oligarchical of all countries rather prided herself on the liberalism of her institutions, and was used to contrast her happiness under a limited and constitutional monarchy and an unlimited and aristocratic Parliament with the misery and financial prostration of autocratic France. Englishmen were used to celebrate the " glorious Revolution " of 1688, on which was based the supremacy of the Protestant religion and the landowning classes. At first, there were Englishmen, even in the governing classes, disposed to hope that the French Revolution might be only another 1688, and that France might settle down to constitutional monarchy on the English model, based on the fullest security of property and the firm ascendancy of the " better part " of the nation.

But as the Revolution in France passed, under the menace of foreign interference, to more extreme courses, as the landowners were expropriated, as Jacobin ousted Girondin and aristocracy

and king were swept away by the rising tide, all " respectable " opinion joined the chorus of denunciation. The governing classes of Europe entered into a holy league against Jacobinism and revolution. In 1793 Great Britain and France were at war, and the struggle lasted, with changing features and changing character, until the final defeat of Napoleon in 1815.

Here we are concerned, not with the French Revolution in itself, but with its influence on British opinion. It did two things. It gave British Radicalism a philosophy ; and it caused the governing classes to adopt a repressive policy which, for a generation, kept all forms of Radicalism firmly in check. The first attempts of the workers at independent political organisation arose directly out of the events in France ; the speed and severity with which they were crushed were directly due to the fear which those events had inspired. The " Corresponding Societies " in England and Scotland in the last decade of the eighteenth century were the first political bodies, as distinct from Trade Clubs and Friendly Societies, created by the workers under their own leadership and for their own ends.

This is not to say that there was no Radical movement before 1789. There had been, for a long time past, popular discontents and movements of revolt against the aristocratic ascendancy. The Dissenters, and especially the Unitarians, led by Price and Priestley, were largely radical, demanding that equality in political and social affairs which they were denied for themselves, and, after the manner of repressed groups, liberally claiming fair treatment for others as well. The farmers and smaller landowners in the counties had long been discontented with the corrupt Parliament, which, packed by the nominees of the owners of rotten boroughs, failed to represent adequately even the landed classes. They had started many county movements for " economical reform," and, from 1780, had conducted, under Christopher Wyvill's industrious leadership, an active movement for the reform of Parliament itself. In the 'sixties John Wilkes and his friends had stirred the people of London and Middlesex with the cry of electoral freedom, and in 1769 the same group had started the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights, with an advanced programme of parliamentary reform. About 1780 Major John Cartwright, most faithful of Radical leaders of the old school, had begun his crusade

for the reform of Parliament, and had founded, with a keen group of middle-class Radicals, the Society for Constitutional Information. In these movements were active men who, like Thomas Day, author of " Sandford and Merton," had learnt from Rousseau and the French Encyclopædists the doctrines which formed the ideological basis of the subsequent Revolution in France.

Above all, but a few years before 1789, another revolution had sharply stirred political feeling and Radical sentiment in Great Britain. The Declaration of Independence issued by the American Colonies has many points in common with the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the American Revolution anticipated in some measure the controversies and the Radical doctrines which the French Revolution more decisively aroused. There was strong sympathy in England for the Americans ; and two great names in English Radicalism link the two Revolutions together. Richard Price's " Discourse on Civil Liberty " and Tom Paine's " Common Sense " were the two great English manifestoes in the American cause. Price's sermon on the " Love of Country " and Paine's " Rights of Man " were the first great English utterances of sympathy with the Revolution in France.

But the American Revolution seemed far away, and the French very near at hand. The former, too, was the insurgence of a developing nation against external domination ; the latter was the rising of a people against its rulers. The French Revolution involved the more fundamental issues, and made by far the sharper break with the past. It aroused, therefore, far more vehement controversy, far deeper sentiments, and far greater fears.

Burke, in his " Reflections on the Revolution " (1790), raised early the cry of panic. In Paine's phrase, he " pitied the plumage and forgot the dying bird "—pitied the fine ladies and fine gentlemen whose power fell with the great change ; forgot the starving people of France who had provided that finery. His book, written in the fervour of a revelation, is an inspired plea against the whole idea of revolution, and even of political change. It is a worship of things established because they enshrine a tradition ; a panic denunciation of all who would touch institutions hallowed by age, whatever sufferings and injustices may be entwined in them.

Burke's book, itself an answer to Dr. Price, called forth a host

of answers. Mary Wollstonecraft was among the first with her " Vindication of the Rights of Man " (1790) ; William Godwin's great " Enquiry into Political Justice " (1793) came later, to serve as the intellectual inspiration of generations of reformers to come. But the popular answer, which swept through the country and became the political Bible of Radicalism, as Burke's " Reflections " became the Bible of the old order, was Tom Paine's " Rights of Man " (Part I., 1791 ; Part II., 1792). Paine spoke a plain language, easily understood. He who had been the greatest pamphleteer of the Revolution in America, became in England the protagonist of the French Revolution and its ideas.

Nowadays, Paine's book seems mild enough. Godwin's anarchistic gospel of human perfectibility went far deeper. But Paine said just the things that were most calculated to rouse the ordinary man, and to put Radical thoughts into his head. His defence of France was a simple plea, such as he had spoken earlier to the people of America, for full democracy, for equality between man and man, and for the spirit of fraternity among equals.

To Paine belongs the credit, under the inspiration of the Revolution in France, of setting on foot the first unmistakable movement of working-class Radicalism in England. The battle of pamphlets, set going by Burke's and Paine's books, soon became also a battle of organisations. Major Cartwright, Horne Tooke, and the middle-class Radicals revived the Society for Constitutional Information, which had been inactive for some years. The more aristocratic Whigs, followers of Charles James Fox, who still defended the French Revolution, founded the more moderate Friends of the People. And in 1792 appeared the London Corresponding Society, the first distinctively working-class political body in English history.

The London Corresponding Society was founded by a little group of skilled workmen. Its leader and secretary was Thomas Hardy, a shoemaker from Stirlingshire. The subscription was a penny a week, and as the society grew it was divided into groups of thirty members each, and governed by a meeting of delegates from the groups. Its object was to secure parliamentary reform and adult suffrage.

The L.C.S. set to work, by leaflets, pamphlets, and correspondence with workmen in other parts of the country, to create a

national movement for reform. It disavowed violence, and its methods were, in fact, largely educational. It entered at once into friendly relations with the " Constitutional Society," and both Cartwright and Horne Tooke gave it some help. Very soon its efforts began to bear fruit. Societies sprang up all over England, and in Scotland a largely similar movement made immense headway. Meanwhile, in Ireland, the Society of United Irishmen, started as a reforming body, which aimed at the union of Catholic and Protestant on a basis of common nationality, was fast goaded into becoming an organised revolutionary movement, mainly of Catholics, which saw no escape from oppression save by a violent upheaval and an alliance with the French Republic.

The societies which sprang up in Great Britain were of many different types. Some were purely or mainly working-class bodies ; some included a substantial middle-class element. In Scotland, it seems, the movement, on the whole, was led by middle-class men, but was largely working-class in composition. In London, as we have seen, the middle-class Constitutional Society and the working-class Corresponding Society were in regular touch with each other.

During 1792 most of these bodies freely exchanged addresses with the revolutionary clubs in France or with the French Convention, urging the need for an alliance of the two countries on a basis of free institutions. They also showed, in many cases, their sympathy with the French by adopting French forms in their discussions, addressing one another as " Citizens," and talking of calling, not a conference, but a " Convention," as after 1917 rebels in England spoke of " Soviets " or " Soldiers' and Workers' Councils." Already in 1792 a Scottish Convention, representing eighty societies, was held in Edinburgh.

The growth of these movements caused great alarm in governing-class circles. A certain John Reeves, with Government help, formed a " Society for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers " as a counter-revolutionary organisation, which held " loyal " meetings up and down the country, published " loyal " literature, and intimidated licence-holders from allowing their premises to be used for Radical gatherings. A great campaign of espionage was set on foot, and informers and police agents were planted in most of the Radical bodies. This

method was practised most extensively in Scotland ; but it soon spread over the whole country.

Meanwhile in France the Revolution was passing swiftly from stage to stage. The Republic was proclaimed in September, 1792 ; Louis XVI. was executed in January, 1793 ; and in the following month England and France were at war. The Revolutionary Tribunal was instituted in March, and the Committee of Public Safety in April. At the end of May the moderate Girondins fell, and Jacobin ascendancy was assured. Soon, the " Terror " was in full force.

These events had swift reactions in Great Britain. Paine, who had fled to France, was tried and outlawed in December, 1792 ; and one bookseller after another was imprisoned for selling his and other Radical works. Daniel Eaton, the leading Radical publisher and bookseller, editor of " Hog's Wash," was, indeed, twice acquitted by London juries ; but in the provinces many convictions were secured.

Early in 1793 the Government delivered a more serious blow. Thomas Muir, a young Scottish advocate, and the Rev. Thomas Palmer, a Unitarian Minister of Dundee, two of the chief leaders among the Scottish Radicals, were arrested, and, after ludicrously unfair trials, sentenced, the one to fourteen and the other to seven years' transportation. With these trials the *régime* of repression seriously began.

The arrests did not daunt the Radicals. The Scottish Reformers called a further Convention for the autumn of 1793, and an adjourned session in November was attended by three delegates from the London Corresponding Society. In Ireland, a special Act had just made such Conventions illegal, and there were rumours of similar legislation preparing in Great Britain. The Scottish Convention passed a series of resolutions deciding that, in this event, or if the Habeas Corpus Act were suspended, or if an invasion took place, a further Convention on a national basis should be immediately summoned.

The Government at once responded to this defiance by dispersing the Convention and arresting the principal leaders, including Skirving, the secretary, and Margarot and Gerrald, two of the London delegates. All three were sentenced to transportation for fourteen years. The Scottish movement for reform, save for a

futile and abortive insurrectionary plot, devised by a handful of the remaining delegates under the leadership of the former Government spy and agent, Robert Watt, was effectively crushed. Watt's conspiracy was discovered before anything had been done beyond the procuring of a few weapons. It is still a moot point whether he did not deliberately hatch the whole affair in order to betray it, and so restore himself to favour with the Government. Whether or no, he was hanged. Lord Braxfield, Stevenson's "Weir of Hermiston," distinguished himself by his brutal conduct on the bench as the leader of the Scottish repression.

Having terrorised the Scottish Radicals, Pitt's Government turned its attention to England, and made up its mind to strike one great blow at the two societies which were leading the agitation. Warrants were issued in May, 1794, against most of the principal leaders of both the Constitutional and the Corresponding Societies. Cartwright, rather surprisingly, was let alone; but Horne Tooke, with Thomas Hardy and the chief working-class leaders, was put in gaol. At the same time the House of Commons appointed a "Committee of Secrecy," which, on the evidence submitted to it by the Government, professed to detect a widespread revolutionary conspiracy to overthrow the Crown by violence and subvert the rights of property.

The prisoners were left some time in gaol before their trial, and all sorts of brow-beating were employed in order to extort incriminating confessions. But there appears to have been, in reality, very little to confess. There is nothing at all to connect the English Radicals with Watt's conspiracy, and nothing to back up the Committee of Secrecy's charges that an insurrection was in the making. There had been fiery speeches, of course, and adjurations to follow the French example. But of action, or preparation for action, there had been hardly anything. The Radical movement of this time was never nearly strong enough seriously to consider trying armed conclusions with the powerful and firmly-seated British aristocracy. Despite all the endeavours of the Government, Hardy, Horne Tooke, and John Thelwall, the leading orator of the Corresponding Society, whose cases were taken first, as the strongest from the Government's point of view, were, in turn, acquitted. After Thelwall's acquittal, the Government accepted the setback, and released the remainder of the

prisoners. London, with its strong Radical traditions of more than a century, did not provide juries which, like those of Scotland, could be relied on to do reaction's work.

This triumph, however, profited the movement little. The Radical societies had already been deprived of many of their best leaders, and their more timid followers had been frightened away. The emergency powers, including the suspension of Habeas Corpus, which Pitt had obtained from Parliament, remained in force. There was no guarantee that the next batch of prosecutions would not be more successful. Moreover, events in France, from the time of the Terror, were steadily alienating moderate opinion, and later, as the Revolution turned gradually into a military despotism, Radicals as well ceased to look to France for inspiration. The Constitutional Society died at once ; the Corresponding Society, though it lingered on until it was suppressed in 1799, did nothing noteworthy after 1794. Francis Place, who became chairman, resigned this position in 1796, and left the society in the following year.

Indeed, after 1794 the centre of Radical interest shifted to Ireland, where the United Irishmen were growing stronger and eagerly invoking French help. The naval mutiny at the Nore in 1797, which roused the Government to fresh measures of repression, was almost certainly led largely by impressed Irish sailors, under the influence of the United Irishmen. In the following year came the " Ninety-Eight," the abortive rising in the north, and the landing of a small French force in Ireland. When this movement had been easily suppressed, the French Revolution had exhausted its direct influence in these islands. Robert Emmet's rising in Dublin in 1803 was but a final flicker.

The mutiny at the Nore, following upon a smaller mutiny at Spithead, arose over purely economic grievances ; and the political significance which it took on was probably due to Irish influence. But the dying Radical societies in Great Britain got the blame. One at least of their leaders, John Binns, was concerned in the attempt to procure French help for the Irish rising of 1798, and, with his brother, in trying to organise a Society of United Englishmen on the Irish model. The events of these years stimulated the Government to fresh measures of repression. By the Corresponding Societies Act of 1799, national associations

with branches and corresponding relations between local associations, were made illegal. In the same year, and again in 1800, general Combination Acts were passed, and all forms of Trade Unionism were suppressed by law.

Thus the first political movement of the British workers ran its short course, and died out under the influence of war and repression. It is not easy to measure the power or influence which it had when it was at its height. Certainly the " scare " conclusions about the planning of a general insurrection, drawn by the House of Commons and some of the newspapers under the influence of panic, must be heavily discounted. The movement never, in fact, got far enough to consider seriously whether its intentions were revolutionary or pacific. Nor did it get far enough to introduce any precision into its aims. It was still at the stage of passing declaratory resolutions when the Government swooped down on it and broke it into fragments. It is most improbable that, outside a few towns, it influenced appreciably even the main body of working-class opinion. It was not the houses of the leading " loyalists," but those of the Radical Dr. Priestley, and his dissenting friends, that the mob of Birmingham burnt down in 1791.

There is a plain reason for this failure. The French Revolution came at a time when Great Britain, under the influence of the swift changes in agriculture and industry, was in a stage of transition. There was in 1789 the necessary basis neither for an agrarian nor for an urban revolution. The peasantry, under stress of enclosures, had already lost its independence, and was too weak to stand up to its masters. The Corresponding Societies seem to have had little contact with the countryside, save in a few areas such as Norfolk. It is true that the outbreak of war in 1793 was followed by a movement among the labourers for redress. High prices caused acute distress ; and in 1795 the Norfolk labourers, at a mass meeting at Heacham, decided to organise a national petition for higher wages. But this peasant movement never got on its feet. It was crushed out in the repression which followed the defeat of the Corresponding Societies. For a generation of increasing misery, the peasants, save for a few localised disturbances, suffered in silence.

While the peasants were thus prostrate, the mass of the new factory workers had not yet gained the cohesion or confidence

needed for any movement more ambitions than a bread riot. The backbone of the Corresponding Societies came from neither of these classes, but from the artisans and small tradesmen in the older towns ; a keen and intelligent body of men, long accustomed to Trade Unionism and capable of coherent action, but far too weak by themselves to make a revolution. Their middle-class allies, very differently situated socially from the middle classes in France, wanted, not a revolution, but a reform, and were not prepared to go the length of revolution when reform was denied. They were inclined, like the leaders of the middle-class Revolution Society in 1789, to regard the English Revolution of 1688 as having set on foot a process which only needed completion by constitutional reforms in order to make Great Britain a happy and thoroughly well-governed country. The middle classes were too comfortable, and the paupers and factory hands too dispirited, to make a revolution. The skilled artisans, many of whom were fairly comfortable themselves, and could still step up fairly easily into the lower middle class, were, in any case, far too weak to make one. But, in face of the panic of the ruling classes and the repressive policy of the Government, no Radical movement could live save by revolutionary success. Accordingly, the short-lived Radicalism provoked by the French Revolution was crushed, and no great new popular movement appeared in Great Britain until after the Peace of 1815.

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CHAPTER IV. WAR AND PEACE

1. Trade Union Struggles—The Years of War
2. Unemployment, Revolt and Repression

I

Trade Union Struggles—The Years of War

Trade Unions, we have seen, existed long before the Industrial Revolution. We can trace their working throughout the eighteenth century by references in parliamentary debates, periodicals, and other contemporary documents, even though no continuous record of their activities remains. We can see from these references well enough what these early Trade Unions were and did. In the first place, they were mostly local, though on occasions they corresponded over wide areas, and gave one another help in strikes. Secondly, they existed mainly among the skilled craftsmen in the older towns—printers, bootmakers, tailors, and the like; or in those sections of the woollen industry in which the capitalist had intervened as employer, and not merely as merchant—*e.g.*, wool-combing. The majority were quite small; but they seem often to have been powerful in relation to the crafts which they represented, and to have been successful both in negotiating collective agreements and in restricting employment to their members. In many cases they appear to have acted as Friendly Societies as well as Trade Unions, and to have possessed a strong social and convivial side. The line between Trade Unions and Friendly Societies was still not clearly drawn; some of the early Lodges of Oddfellows (*i.e.*, miscellaneous workers) appear to have been in part Trade Union bodies.

The eighteenth century Trade Unions and Clubs had very limited objects, and little sense of a common solidarity between trade and trade, or a distinctive political outlook. There was no organised link between the societies of different trades, or, usually, between those of the same trade centred round different meeting places, which were usually inns. Their aims were mutual help within the craft, and the protection of the craft and of craft standards of employment. Sometimes they struck work; more often they sought to negotiate satisfactory agreements with the employers,

who were, in most cases, small masters, little removed from the status of journeymen. Failing such agreements, they often petitioned Parliament for legal protection, or asked the justices to enforce the old Elizabethan statutes for the fixing of wages and the regulation of apprenticeship. They were often prepared to join with their employers in asking for State protection for their trades ; and probably they felt at least as close a unity with the small masters of their own trade as with the journeymen of other trades. Save in those sections of industry which, like the woollen industry in the west of England, and the coal industry in the north-east, were already developing on a basis of large-scale Capitalism, there is no sign of any acute class-struggle in industry before the Industrial Revolution. There were bickerings and disputes ; but there is no evidence of sustained hostility, or of any permanent ranging of employers and workers in opposite camps.

As the Industrial Revolution advanced, this situation changed, not so much at first by an alteration in the status of the workers in the older urban crafts as by the rise, side by side with them, of new types of industry and of a new working class recruited from the dispossessed peasantry. For some time the old Trade Unions and Clubs went on much as before, until they were affected by the growing fear of the workers in the mind of the ruling classes after the French Revolution, and by the rise of a new type of working-class organisation in the textile and mining industries of the north of England. We have seen how, by the two general Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800, all forms of Trade Unionism were made illegal, and the Pitt system of repression was extended from the political bodies, such as the Corresponding Societies, to all forms of working-class industrial organisation. These measures, though they were part of the general repression which followed the mutiny at the Nore and the rebellion of the United Irishmen, were prompted chiefly, not by fear of the older Trade Clubs, to which most of the Corresponding Societies' members probably belonged, but by the beginnings of Trade Union organisation among the miners and factory workers in the northern and midland counties. A movement confined to the older crafts could easily be kept in check ; but if, under the leadership of the minority of intelligent artisans, it spread to the growing mass of

half-starved and violently discontented miners and factory workers, the danger of revolution might become real and imminent.

It must be remembered that the French Revolution and the outbreak of the anti-revolutionary war against France came swiftly on the heels of the first great onrush of industrial change. The last quarter of the eighteenth century was a period of furious industrial activity. Watt perfected his steam engine in 1776; the rapid spread of factory spinning in the cotton industry began about 1780; road-making and canal-building were being pressed swiftly forward in order to deal with the increasing volume of merchandise; the demand for coal, for both household and industrial purposes, was growing fast; the Enclosure Movement was at its period of greatest intensity; the new proletariat was thronging into the factory and mining districts, and creating there a social problem which presented itself to the upper classes chiefly in the guise of a social peril.

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, whose book, "The Town Labourer," graphically reveals the mind of the new industrial age, the helpless kicking against the pricks of the factory workers, the panic repressiveness of the ruling classes, have described, in "The Skilled Labourer," the many attempts at organisation made by the factory operatives and miners during this period. We can see in their books how the lead in organisation had almost always to be taken, not by the new types of wage-slaves, but by the older established craftsmen, whose status and standards were menaced by the Industrial Revolution. In the cotton industry these revolts were led first by the spinners, and later by the hand-loom weavers, as successive changes in machinery overthrew their old monopoly of skill. In the collieries, the lead was taken by the skilled miners, whose relatively high wages were being beaten down by the competition of fresh labour imported from the agricultural districts or from distressed and over-populated Ireland.

These leaders of revolt in the factory districts were men of much the same social types as the skilled urban craftsmen—builders, bootmakers, tailors, bakers, and the rest—whose standards and methods of work were not yet seriously menaced by the coming of machinery and large-scale capitalist organisation. There was, in the minds of the ruling class, the ever-present fear that the Radical minority of workers, who were educated enough

to organise effective combinations and to imbibe Jacobin doctrines, might mobilise the mass of unorganised factory workers in support of a national revolutionary movement.

This accounts both for the panic severity with which the movement of the Corresponding Societies was stamped out, and for the relentless war waged by the Government and the new capitalist employers against all attempts at working-class organisation in the factory districts. In themselves, both working-class political clubs and Trade Unions of the old sort were relatively harmless, and would have provoked no great movement of repression. But, as the sparks that might set the factory districts alight, they were quenched with all the Government's resources.

Pitt's measures for carrying through this policy of repression were skilfully designed. We have seen how he stamped out the Corresponding Societies, and killed for a generation even the middle-class movement for reform. Legal persecution, backed up by the evidence of spies and informers, and by counter-propaganda subsidised by the State, was adequate for this purpose. The factory districts had to be held down by more vigorous methods. In addition to sending into every working-class body that could be found spies, informers, and even provocative agents, and so disrupting the working-class movements, because no man in them knew whether he could trust his neighbour, the Government built up a powerful armed force for dealing with all signs of disturbance. Pitt abolished the old practice of billeting troops in the homes of the people, where they might easily become contaminated with Radical doctrines. Instead, he built barracks at strategic points throughout the country, and used his concentrated military force in order to overawe the people. In addition by creating the new Volunteers and Yeomanry, he replaced the old Militia, who could not be trusted, with a force ready to deal, not so much with possible invasion from abroad, as with civil commotion at home. The Yeomanry, especially, were an upper and middle-class force on which the governing classes could place the fullest reliance. Even where the Volunteers felt qualms, the Yeomanry thoroughly enjoyed riding down an unarmed mob to the glory of Capitalism and the Constitution.

It must be remembered that there was at this time, apart from the small body of Bow Street Runners, no properly organised

police force anywhere in the country. The Metropolitan Police, or "Peelers," did not come into existence till Sir Robert Peel created them in 1829, and the system did not become national until after the Reform Act of 1832. The tiny bodies of constables previously in existence were quite useless in face of any organised movement. The use of troops to deal with disturbances, therefore, seemed to Pitt and his associates the only possible course[1]; but it is easy to see that the measures actually taken were dictated by panic fear, and were, in effect, a wholesale arming of the rich against the poor.

Overawed by military force, ceaselessly spied and reported upon by agents of the Government or the local magistrates, liable to severe sentences for conspiracy or for violation of the Combination Acts if they attempted any concerted action, it is not surprising that for a long time the factory workers and miners failed to create any stable combinations. It is more surprising that they managed to combine at all. It is nevertheless true that many Trade Unions existed through the whole period during which the Combination Acts were in force, and that many temporary combinations and strikes took place even among the workers who experienced the greatest rigour of the repression.

This is only in part explained by the fact that the Combination Acts were not everywhere enforced with the same severity as in the great factory districts of the North. To some extent, local Trade Clubs of artisans in the older towns were allowed to exist and to carry on their work without systematic prosecution. In some trades, employers went on negotiating collective agreements with the Unions, and strikes occurred, almost as if the Combination Acts had never been passed. But this applies only to trades not yet directly affected by the Industrial Revolution, and still carried on under the old system of small-scale production. In these cases there was no fear that industrial action might lead to a revolutionary outbreak, and the Government, having no cause for anxiety, often let such movements alone. There was, however, always the risk that some interested persons might set the law in motion, even in such cases. For example, when, in 1798, the London printers, on the invitation of their employers, met to

[1] Special constables for dealing with emergencies were instituted under Charles II., but seldom used till well on in the nineteenth century.

discuss wages and conditions, they were indicted for conspiracy and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. This was actually before the Combination Act, at the height of the panic caused by the Nore mutiny and the Irish outbreak. Again, in 1810, *The Times* compositors received a brutal sentence for the crime of combination. The older Trade Clubs, which mostly took the precaution during this time of disguising themselves as Friendly Societies, were often let alone ; but they were at the mercy of any employer or informer who might choose to take action against them.

In the new industrial districts—Lancashire, Yorkshire, the East Midlands, and the north-east coast—persecution was far more brutal and systematic ; for here, in the view of the ruling classes, the real danger lay. Here the magistrates, with every encouragement from the Home Office, and the backing of a host of spies and informers, and of the Yeomanry and other military forces, set to work to prevent all forms of working-class combination. The archives of the Home Office are full of the local reports on these activities, and from these reports Mr. and Mrs. Hammond have drawn much of the material for their books.

The Combination Acts nominally applied to masters as well as men ; but, so far as is known, no single prosecution of a master for the crime of combination ever took place. The Acts were used, and meant, solely for the suppression of working-class movements.

Until about 1808 they were successful to the extent that no stable working-class combinations arose in the factory districts, and strikes and riots were kept down to the scale of purely localised movements. There were protests against the introduction of machinery, accompanied sometimes by sporadic machine-breaking ; there were strikes and disputes about wages. But these seem to have been, for the most part, on a small scale. Indeed, to a great extent the aim of the workers up to this time was rather to secure State intervention on their behalf than to organise for independent industrial action.

It must be remembered that the old Elizabethan Statute of Artificers, under which conditions of employment were regulated, and the magistrates were empowered to fix wages, was still unrepealed at this time. There were also many other Acts, such as the Spitalfields Act for the silk weavers, dealing with wages and

conditions in particular trades. The Elizabethan Statute and many of the other Acts had, in practice, fallen into disuse ; but it was still, in theory, the business of the State to regulate wages. Thus the cotton operatives, in the last years of the eighteenth century, were constantly agitating for the fixing of a minimum wage by the State. Pitt passed an Arbitration Act in 1800 ; and this was amended three years later. But it remained, in fact, almost inoperative, owing to obstruction by the masters. In 1805 the weavers formed a general combination with the object, not of striking for higher wages, but of pressing Parliament by petition to pass a Minimum Wage Act. Some of the employers supported this claim ; but the Minimum Wage Bill was overwhelmingly defeated in the House of Commons in 1808. Parliament had not yet quite reached the point of formally proclaiming its *laissez faire* doctrine, and repudiating all attempts to interfere with freedom of contract between employers and workers. But it was moving rapidly towards that conclusion. In 1813 the clauses for the regulation of wages in the Elizabethan Law were formally repealed, and in 1814 the apprenticeship clauses were also abrogated. The doctrine of *laissez faire* was thus proclaimed, and the precept of Parliament brought into line with what had been for some time its prevailing practice.

The rejection of the Minimum Wage Bill in 1808 brought the cotton workers face to face with the fact that they could look for no help from the State. It provoked the first large-scale industrial movement in the new factory districts ; a great strike of both cotton and woollen weavers broke out all over Lancashire, and resulted, despite the Combination Acts, which were not used against the strikers, in a temporary victory. Soon, however, wages were again reduced.

Two years later the miners of Northumberland and Durham conducted their first general strike, the issue being the proposal of the coal owners to worsen the conditions of the yearly bond. All the strike leaders were imprisoned and, overawed by military force and the threat of prosecution, the men were compelled to return on the employers' terms. There is no evidence of any coherent Union behind this strike ; but delegates were chosen from the various pits to conduct the struggle, and to draw up the settlement.

In 1812 came a general strike of the weavers in Scotland. The

men first attempted to get an agreed scale of wages by negotiation with the employers. When this failed, they appealed to the magistrates to fix a scale. After long and expensive legal proceedings, the magistrates were compelled to publish a scale; but they refused to take any measures for its enforcement, and the employers accordingly refused to pay. The strike followed, and lasted for three weeks. Then, just as the employers had agreed to meet the men, the authorities suddenly arrested the entire Strike Committee, and charged the members under the Combination Act. They were sentenced to periods of imprisonment of from four to eighteen months. The strike was broken and the Union shattered.

Far more important than these occasional big strikes was the organised movement of machine-breaking which began in 1811 in the hosiery districts of the Midland Counties. There had been plenty of sporadic machine-breaking—an instinctive protest against the new inhuman competition of human labour—long before 1811. But the Luddite Movement was an organised affair, skilfully directed by leaders who, working in secret, established an extraordinary hold over the framework-knitters, whose standard of life was being beaten down by new methods of production. Framework-knitting was still carried on mainly in the workers' homes; but the frames belonged to the employers. The trouble centred round the making of a new cheap kind of "cut up" hose at less than the recognised rates of pay, and the use of a new wide frame which reduced the number of workers employed. The Luddite remedy was the intimidation of the offending employers by the breaking of the obnoxious frames, which it was nearly impossible to defend, as they were scattered widely in the cottages of the workers.

The name "Luddites" arose because the machine-breakers carried out their campaign, and issued their warnings and proclamations, in the name of one "Ned Ludd" or "King Ludd," Sherwood Forest—a mythical leader whose name linked itself up with the legends of Robin Hood as the friend of the poor. Who "Ned Ludd" was, or who were the real leaders of the movement, was never discovered. A number of machine-breakers, chiefly youths, were sentenced to transportation for the offence. But the leaders were never brought to trial, and the employers were com-

pelled by the movement to raise wages and, in part, remedy the men's grievances.

From the Midlands "Luddism" spread to Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the name was applied to all organised attacks on machinery for some time after the original movement had died down. But in the cotton and wool industries, where the offending machines were chiefly to be found in factories, under the direct protection of the employers, the movement found far greater difficulties in its way. In Lancashire and Yorkshire, machine-breaking and "Luddism" were never more than incidents or auxiliaries of strike action, and achieved no success comparable with that of the original Luddites in the Midlands.

The scale of the movement and its initial success were, however, enough to rouse the greatest alarm. Once more the Houses of Parliament appointed Secret Committees, and fresh repressive legislation was hurried through. The measures taken against the Luddites in 1812 prepared the way for the more far-reaching repression of the years following the Peace of 1815.

Luddism and a few of the strike movements of the war period have been described in outline in order to give an idea of the difficulties which the pioneers of Trade Union action had to face. We see the workers first trying to persuade a hostile Parliament or a hostile body of magistrates to come to their help, on the old principle that it was the State's business to regulate the affairs of industry and to secure to each his appointed status and reward. We see the governing classes and the employers, under the influence of changing economic conditions, repudiating this old theory, asserting the new doctrine of *laissez faire*, and supporting their action with quotations from the writings of Adam Smith and the political economists of the new school. Finally, we see the workers, as they realise the hopelessness of appeals to the law, and especially during the years of sharp fluctuations in trade and prices towards the end of the Napoleonic wars, turning in despair to mass industrial action as a means of redress.

Undoubtedly the war was a very powerful factor, especially during these latter years, in depressing the workers' standard of living and in sharpening the conflict between the classes concerned in large-scale industry. War drained away wealth and dislocated trade. It caused a huge rise in prices, which was ceaselessly beat-

ing down real wages. It accentuated the struggle for the means of life. Historians differ in the emphasis which they place on the long continuance of the war as a cause of the prevailing misery of the times ; but all are agreed that it was a factor which greatly strengthened the forces making for the decline in the workers' standard of life.

As conditions grew worse, a powerful movement in favour of peace developed among the workers. Peace and Reform became popular cries. Cobbett, Henry Hunt, and other Radical leaders, gained an ever-growing body of supporters. Many employers, too, were for Peace and Reform ; for they saw in Peace the prospect of lower taxes and the expansion of trade, and in Reform the means to the controlling influence in the State. In these last years of the great war, the virtues of Peace and the blessings which would follow it were loudly proclaimed.

In 1815 Peace came at last, and with it the first great and general industrial depression in the history of modern Industrialism.

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II

Unemployment, Revolt and Repression

It has been said with truth that British Socialism was born on the morrow of the Peace of 1815. There had been, during the long war, a great deal of distress, especially among the agricultural workers and in the factory districts. There had been many strikes and machine-breaking disturbances, culminating in the Luddite troubles of 1811 and 1812. There had been plenty of persecution and repression, continuous from the days of panic which followed the Revolution in France. There had been, too, in the later years of the war, a marked revival of Radical agitation, and the cry of " Peace and Reform " had provided men like Burdett and Cobbett with a means of popular appeal. But, on the whole, there had been no joining of forces by the Radical reformers and the mass of the factory workers. Radicalism had still found its chief following among the middle classes—farmers and tradesmen—and among the relatively prosperous artisans in the older towns. The factory workers were only just beginning to relate their economic grievances to a political programme, and hardly at all to express them in a social policy of their own.

In 1815 the group of tendencies which can fairly be called Socialist was represented only by one tiny sect—the Spenceans. The followers of Paine, still through his writings the greatest Radical influence, were in no sense Socialist. Cobbett was an agrarian reformer who was only just beginning to address himself directly to the factory workers, and was, in any case, as little an advocate of any sort of Socialism as of Capitalism. William Godwin, whose philosophic anarchism came nearer to a Socialist view, had ceased for the time to exert any direct influence on working-class opinion.

Thomas Spence, son of a small artisan shopkeeper who had migrated from Aberdeen to Newcastle-on-Tyne, became a schoolmaster, and subsequently, moving to London, a hawking book-

seller and editor of Radical papers. He was active in the London Corresponding Society, and served several terms of imprisonment for his Radical activities. His views, expounded in a number of pamphlets from 1776 onwards, were those of an agrarian communist. He preached social ownership of the land, which was to be vested in the parish and let out to farmers at a rental. This rent was to be the only tax, and Society was to be organised as a federation of wholly democratic parish communes. Mere political reforms Spence held to be useless; he pleaded for a peasant society, based on communal land ownership, and "capable of delivering us from the deadly mischief of great accumulations of wealth."

Spence's doctrine was fully developed in 1775, and was therefore wholly independent of influences derived either from France or from the Industrial Revolution. The London Corresponding Society made him known to the working-class Radicals, and after its collapse a body of disciples began to gather round him. But apparently they formed no association of their own until 1812 when the Society of Spencean Philanthropists was created, by a group which included Thistlewood, leader in the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820, and the Watsons, together with a number of London artisans headed by Thomas Preston and Thomas Evans. Spence himself died in 1814; but the Spencean Society continued, and played an important part in the years following the Peace. It had never more than a very small group of adherents; but as the one body putting forward a definitely Socialist and confiscatory programme, it was the special object of the attention of "loyalists," and its doctrines and activities were chiefly quoted whenever the Government desired to prove the existence of a revolutionary plot.

When Peace was made in 1815, and Napoleon had been finally crushed and exiled, the country looked forward eagerly to a return of good times. For more than twenty years, all manner of hardships, grievances and abuses had been put down to the war, and redress had been promised on the coming of Peace. The war had drained the national resources; for Great Britain had beaten Napoleon even more with her money than with her men. It had upset trade; and both Continental and American markets had been, especially during its later years, largely closed to British

merchandise. It had killed the movement for political reform; for military needs must not be hampered by constitutional changes. It had made repression easy, by enabling Pitt to cover the country with barracks and to provide the country with a Yeomanry force even more useful in dealing with civilian disturbances than with the threat of invasion.

So, in 1815, every one who had a claim or a grievance expected speedy satisfaction, and, above all, manufacturers and workers looked to the re-opened markets for the means of regular and profitable employment. These hopes were speedily disappointed. An agricultural depression which had begun, chiefly owing to the great increase of tillage and the abundant harvests, before the end of the war became much worse with the cessation of the abnormal war-time demand. In commerce, a feverish period of speculative export speedily glutted the foreign markets, which lacked the wherewithal to buy, and a slump of unprecedented severity followed. Agricultural wages were reduced far below starvation level, and more labourers driven wholesale to the Poor Law for relief. Factory after factory was shut down, and the operatives flung out of work. Bankruptcies and bank failures multiplied in all parts of the country. Prices fell, indeed; but men soon learnt to prefer high prices which they could pay to low prices which they could not. Moreover, the fall in prices brought home, at the same time as it increased, the staggering burden of the debts incurred during the long war.

Very soon the talk was everywhere of the prevailing distress. The House of Commons set up Committees to report on the position, especially in relation to agriculture and the Poor Laws. The Government, the Church, and the Royal Dukes collaborated in reviving the National Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing and Labouring Poor, which had been originally launched during the distress of 1812. Numerous local relief committees were started and dispensed considerable sums. Proposals were put forward for the provision of employment by the State, but the Government's chief measures were designed, by lowering taxation, to relieve the distress of the farmers and employers, and so promote the revival of trade.

The Radicals, headed by Hunt, Cobbett and Lord Cochrane, also pressed for the lowering of taxes, but added to this demands

for the total or partial repudiation of interest on the War Debt, for the abolition of pensions and sinecures, and for the reform of Parliament. Robert Owen, still the successful cotton-spinner of New Lanark, and wholly untainted with Radical associations, turned from his agitation for a Factory Act to the demand that the State should find employment for all by his scheme for "Villages of Co-operation," in which the poor, settled on the land, would both provide for their own needs and create a surplus which would stimulate the revival of manufacture and commerce. Owen presented his plan, the germ of his Socialist and Co-operative doctrines, both to the Committee on the Poor Laws and to the Association for the Relief of the Poor. The House of Commons Committee refused to hear him; and the Radicals denounced him as an interfering busybody, preaching a nonsensical doctrine of "community." Owen was already seeking a solution of the social problem in the co-operative control of the new forces of production; the Radicals still placed their faith in the relief of taxation and the reform of political institutions.

Before long, the increasing severity of the distress led to widespread movements of unrest. There were riots in the factory districts, and everywhere a great revival of Radical and working-class agitation. For the first time the Radicals began really to capture the mind and imagination of the factory workers, and to secure general working-class backing for their political programme. Cobbett, the greatest of Radical writers, suddenly grew to be the chief leader of the agitation. Hitherto, his famous *Weekly Political Register*, costing, on account of the Stamp and Paper Taxes, more than a shilling an issue, had circulated mainly among the well-to-do. He had been the defender and prophet of the agricultural labourers; but to the factory operatives and to industry he had paid only intermittent attention. From 1815 his tone rapidly changed. He began to appeal directly to the factory workers, and to preach radical reform as a remedy for their troubles. In November, 1816, he began his famous series of "Addresses to the Journeymen and Labourers," published weekly in a special cheap *Register* at twopence a number, which evaded the Stamp Tax by the omission of news, and contained only his rousing "Addresses."

Cobbett's cheap *Register* had an enormous influence, selling 40,000 to 50,000 copies a week. A host of minor journalists and

pamphleteers followed his example. The working-class press, which had been almost non-existent since the suppression of the Corresponding Societies, came suddenly to vigorous life. Wooller's *Black Dwarf*, Hone's *Reformists' Register*, and Sherwin's *Republican* (or *Political Register*), were all started in 1817. At the same time, political meetings were held in all parts of the country. Old Major Cartwright, indefatigable as ever, toured the country, forming Hampden Clubs and Societies for Political Reform. Trade Unionism grew apace, despite the Combination Acts. The Working-class Movement began to take shape in a great outburst of activity under the leadership of the political reformers.

Meanwhile, the little Society of Spencean Philanthropists in London decided to organise a great demonstration. The leaders invited Henry Hunt, next to Cobbett the greatest figure among the Radicals, to be the chief speaker, and prepared an address based on Spencean principles and advocating the Spencean plan of agrarian reform. Hunt, who was no Socialist, rejected the address, and insisted that the purpose of the meeting should be to press for the orthodox Radical programme of political reforms. The Spenceans thereupon decided to hold a separate meeting of their own at an earlier hour on the same day. They left before Hunt's meeting began, and marched off in procession through the City. A riot followed, and some damage was done to property, but the disturbance was, in fact, quite a minor affair, never in the least likely to lead to any serious result.

A riot in London, however, in conjunction with the disturbed state of the factory districts, caused the Government and the upper classes to take fright. They had spies at work within the Spencean Society, and the Spencean declaration, with its policy of Republicanism and confiscation of the land, fell into their hands. It was treated as the programme of a national revolutionary conspiracy, and the riot as the first overt sign of an impending insurrection. Four Spencean leaders, including James Watson the elder, Thistlewood and Preston, were arrested and brought to trial for high treason, and great efforts were made to secure evidence which would implicate Cobbett and Henry Hunt. Both Houses of Parliament appointed Committees of Secrecy, which produced alarming reports, recalling the days of the French Revolution, and proclaiming the existence of a widespread conspiracy,

aimed at the destruction of the monarchy, " a total overthrow of all existing establishments, and a division of the landed, and extinction of the funded, property of the country."

These alarmist reports were at once followed up by special measures of repression. The Spencean Society was suppressed by name, and the old measures against " Corresponding " Societies were renewed. The Habeas Corpus Act was suspended ; all public meetings were placed under the supervision of the magistrates ; all reading-rooms were made subject to licence, which could be forfeited if they supplied undesirable literature. The penalties against treasonable and seditious utterances were stiffened up, and the magistrates given special instructions to act vigilantly in the suppression of all dangerous movements. By the Government itself and by order of local magistrates, a host of spies was sent out into the Radical Societies ; and these, headed by the notorious Oliver, were even more active in manufacturing treason and sedition than in reporting the real activities of the Radicals.

In March, 1817, the workers in the factory districts were busy, under the influence of the Reformers, organising a great petition to the Prince Regent. This, it was decided, should be presented by a great body of marchers, who, starting from Manchester and gathering recruits as they went, were to make their way to London, each man carrying the blanket in which he would sleep by the roadside. The first serious step in the suppression of the popular movement was the breaking up of this march of the " Blanketeers." The leaders were arrested in Manchester before the start, and the few hundred men who set out were harried by bodies of troops and Yeomanry until they dispersed. Wholesale arrests were made ; and it was only after a few months in prison that the bulk of the marchers, who had committed no crime for which they could be brought to trial, were at length released.

In June the trials of the Spenceans came on at last, after long delay, during which no pains were spared in collecting evidence against them. But the " plot," which had existed only in the Government's imagination, could not be proved ; and Watson, whose case was taken first, was acquitted. There was no alternative but to drop the rest of the cases, and the remaining Spenceans were released. Thistlewood, however, was soon lodged in prison again for a year on a fresh charge—that of libelling the Prince Regent.

The great " Spencean plot " thus dissolved in smoke ; but, even while the trials were proceeding, a fresh plot was in course of manufacture. The spy, Oliver, had been actively stirring up insurrection for the purpose of betraying it. Under his influence, two small bands of desperate men were induced to take up arms. The Huddersfield party, luckily for themselves, dispersed almost as soon as they gathered ; the Derbyshire men, led by a frame-work-knitter named Jeremiah Brandreth, made a half-hearted attempt to march on Nottingham. A tiny body of troops caused them to fly without an attempt at resistance, and the so-called " insurrection " was over.

These petty disturbances, magnified into armed insurrections which had been barely quelled by the promptitude of the authorities, served to renew the panic. Word leaked out, indeed, of Oliver's activities as a provocative agent in Yorkshire ; but his name was kept for the time out of the Derbyshire affair, though it was almost wholly of his making. Brandreth and two other leaders were executed, and a number of their followers transported. At the same time a general round-up of Radicals was begun. Speakers addressed meetings at their peril ; both editors and hawkers of Radical journals were imprisoned right and left. Cobbett himself, realising that to remain at home would mean the certainty of a long term of imprisonment, fled secretly to the United States, whence he continued to send his writings for regular publication in England.

Though many of the Radicals went to gaol, the unrest did not die down. Unemployment remained severe, and there were renewed Luddite troubles in Lancashire and Yorkshire. In 1818 there were great strikes in the textile districts, followed by a large number of prosecutions for illegal combination and conspiracy. This year is further notable as having seen the first recorded project of a " general union " of all trades. In London and Manchester this was launched under the curious name of the " Philanthropic Hercules." In London it had behind it the organising ability of John Gast, shipwright, at this time the leader of the Metropolitan trades, and the support of his new journal, *The Gorgon*, the first newspaper largely devoted to Trade Union affairs. But the creation of big Unions was practically impossible under the Combination Acts. We hear no more of the " Philanthropic Hercules " after its first few months of existence.

The repression which accompanied the textile strikes of 1818 strengthened the following of the political Reformers. Weavers and spinners, convinced that they could do nothing by strikes in face of prosecution and military force, turned to the agitation for the reform of Parliament. Despite the Acts of 1817, great Reform meetings and demonstrations were held throughout the industrial districts. One of these meetings, held in St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, on August 16th, 1819, has come down to history as the Massacre of " Peterloo."

The Manchester meeting was designed as a great public demonstration in support of the Reformers. All the witnesses agree that it was entirely peaceful and unarmed. The demonstrators, estimated at 80,000 strong, marched to St. Peter's Fields in contingents from the surrounding districts. No proclamation was made in advance that the meeting would be regarded as illegal ; Henry Hunt, who was the principal speaker, made an offer to surrender himself voluntarily to the authorities beforehand. But those in power took the extraordinary course of allowing the vast multitude to assemble, and then telling the Yeomanry to force their way through and arrest Hunt after he had begun his speech. Despite this provocative action, the crowd managed to give way, and Hunt allowed himself to be arrested without resistance. But at this point the Yeomanry began to strike out at the crowd, and the order to charge was given. Frightful confusion followed. Eleven persons, including two women and a child, were killed outright, and hundreds were injured, many by sabre cuts and many by being trampled down in the crowd. The unarmed demonstrators fled as best they could, leaving their dead and wounded behind.

The Peterloo massacre raised a fury of protest in the country, and many decent men and women, who were not Radicals, supported the protest. But the Government congratulated the authorities responsible for the affair, and treated it as further evidence of revolutionary plans among the people. Towards the close of 1819 came a further and more drastic set of repressive measures—the Six Acts. These Acts (1) equipped the magistrates with more summary and drastic powers in dealing with offenders ; (2) prohibited drilling and training to the use of arms ; (3) strengthened the laws against blasphemous and seditious libel ;

(4) gave the magistrates power to search private houses, and to confiscate weapons ; (5) restricted still further the right of public meeting ; and (6) subjected the periodical pamphlets published by the Radicals to the newspaper tax, with the object of preventing the issue of cheap publications.

These measures made it finally clear that, as far as the Government's power extended, even constitutional agitation was to be ruthlessly suppressed. They were speedily followed by the one instance in which a body of Radicals really made a plot with serious intentions of violence. This was the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820, organised by Thistlewood, who had been released after his year's sentence, and a handful of London Radicals, and aided and instigated by Edwards, a spy and provocative agent of the same sort as Oliver. The plot was to murder the members of the Cabinet, who were dining together at Lord Harrowby's, and then, by proclaiming the deed, to give the signal for a rising. Edwards and another spy betrayed the conspirators' plans, which they had a large share in making. The dinner was cancelled, and Thistlewood and his followers were surprised together in a loft in Cato Street, off the Edgware Road, where they were awaiting the signal. Thistlewood managed to kill one of the attacking party, and to escape ; but he was captured a few hours later, and in due course executed, with several of his accomplices. No rising followed, though in the following month there were strikes in many parts of the country, and in Scotland especially ; and at one place, Bonnymuir, a small body of armed strikers was dispersed by force and the incident magnified into another attempt at insurrection. Here, too, several men, including an ancestor of Keir Hardie, paid with their lives for their part in the movement.

How far was Great Britain, in these years between 1815 and 1820, really on the verge of insurrection ? It is extraordinarily difficult to disentangle the grain of truth from the network of lies in which it is covered up. That discontent and hostility to the Government and the governing classes were deep and widespread is obvious enough. It is clear, too, that strikes were many and often accompanied by some measure of violence. Distress was so severe and so general that nothing else could possibly be expected. Nor can it be doubted that there were many among the working-class Radicals who would have appealed to force if they had seen in its

use any prospect of success. Strikes and Trade Unions were so ruthlessly broken up, freedom of speech and writing so little allowed, that it must have seemed to many that there remained open no way of protest save the way of violence.

Yet the evidence of any revolutionary plot extending beyond one or two tiny and uninfluential coteries is wholly lacking. Nor is it possible to find a single instance in which even these little groups planned violent measures save at the direct instigation of Government agents of the type of Oliver and Edwards. The conclusion can scarcely be resisted that, while the country was indeed full of inflammable material, it was the Government itself that applied to it the few matches that set it here or there precariously alight. And these little flames the power that had made them speedily quenched in blood.

The political Radicals, such as Cobbett and Hunt, kept entirely clear of these insurrectionary movements, and were too wise to be seduced by the agents of the Government. Only a few ignorant men were deluded into believing that there was really a national plan of revolution, and into playing in it their wretched part under the stage-management of the spies who betrayed them. In fact, the main body of the workers lacked the organisation which alone could have made a revolutionary movement possible ; and the leading Radicals, who could, perhaps, have made a revolution, had not the will to do so. They were Radical Reformers, and not revolutionaries ; and the workers without them could not turn the chaotic stirrings of misery into an insurrection. Indeed, the Radical leaders from 1820 onwards were successfully turning the thoughts of the workers from riots and machine-breaking to political agitation. The constitutional struggle for Reform succeeded to the chaos of the years after Waterloo. As trade and industry recovered from the worst of the slump, the workers turned from riots to political organisation ; and, as the panic passed, the repression gradually died down, and constitutional agitation became easier to carry on. The troubles of 1815–1820 were not renewed until the culmination of the next phase of the struggle after 1830, and by then there had been vital changes in both the political and the economic situation.

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CHAPTER V. SOCIALISM AND REFORM

1. Socialist Origins
2. The Repeal of the Combination Acts
3. The Reform Agitation

I

Socialist Origins

The five years from 1815 to 1820 were a season of blind and desperate reactions to intolerable distress. The decade from 1820 to 1830 was the seeding-time of working-class ideas and organisations. In 1815 the only organised body of Socialists was the tiny sect of Spenceans, who were doctrinaire agitators, little concerned with the movement of industrial forces. By 1830 Socialism had already gone far towards taking shape as a movement aiming at the communal control of the new forces unloosed by the Industrial Revolution. On the one hand, there had grown up a body of distinctively Socialist economic doctrine, the forerunner of Marxism ; and, on the other, the Socialist policy of production for use under communal ownership and management had been clearly worked out by Robert Owen and his disciples. The word " Socialism " was, indeed, only beginning to be used, in reference to the Owenites, towards the end of the decade ; but the thing, the idea, had assumed a definite shape and substance.

Moreover, during the decade, organisation developed step by step with doctrine. There was a great growth of Trade Unionism, pointing the way to the greater movement of the years following the Reform Act. Owenism, making its appeal to the more educated section of the workers, already issued in the formation of Socialist and Co-operative Societies for both propaganda and mutual trade. And there was a great growth of working-class journalism, which became a powerful means to the rapid dissemination of the new ideas. At the same time, overshadowing all these other developments in magnitude and popular estimation, the political Reform movement grew fast in power and influence, and gave the workers both valuable experience in organisation and, as the critical days of the Reform Bill drew nearer, a keener insight into the real divisions of class and opinion in Society.

All these movements were, of course, the product less of out-

standing leaders than of the powerful economic forces which were driving Society irresistibly towards a new classification of the people and a reform of institutions and re-distribution of political power. Leadership only served to clarify the movement of forces, and to mobilise opinion based upon it. Cobbett did not make the Reform Movement, though his vigorous personality helped to force the issue, and contributed greatly to the awakening of political consciousness among the workers. Owen came nearer to making Socialism, which was often called " Owenism," in recognition of his influence ; but it is significant that a Socialism closely resembling his developed simultaneously in France, and that there is no evidence of either development, at this early stage, influencing the other. Socialist doctrine, as well as Reform agitation, emerged among the workers because the time was ripe.

During the decade 1820–1830 Socialism and political Radicalism developed side by side, but for the most part quite independently. Cobbett and Owen had little in common save a devotion to the people's cause. Cobbett, as we have seen, was a yeoman who hated the new industrialism, and hoped by political reformation to strike down the new money-lords and bring back a golden age of prosperity to the independent yeoman and craftsman. He wanted Universal Suffrage as a means to the destruction of the power of finance and large-scale Capitalism, in order that England might be again a " Merrie England," pictured as like the free-yeoman America he had known. Every man of initiative should have his farm or his workshop, in which the few hired workers would get good wages and associate with the master on terms of friendship. Such a gospel, he knew, appealed strongly to the men of his day. The factory workers were peasants driven into industry against their wills ; the skilled craftsmen were kicking against the loss of independence great industry had brought. A Reformed Parliament would surely enable the people to have its will, and restore the old order that industrialism was sweeping away.

Owen, on the other hand, was no yeoman, but a great employer—a self-made man of the new order, who had grown up among the new machines and been an active agent in the triumph of the new productive forces. He saw, as clearly as Cobbett, the evils which the Industrial Revolution had brought ; but his remedy was not a return to the past, but a reformation of the new order. Increased

production, the gift of the factory system, seemed to him to promise a more abundant life for all—if only it were organised aright. But the new forces had been allowed to develop uncontrolled, and to serve as the means of fabulous wealth for the few. Machinery, instead of raising the standard of life for all, had been allowed, through insane competition and private greed, to depreciate the value of labour power. This, however, was a case, not against the machine, but against the methods adopted for its use. Machinery and the new forces of production must be socially controlled and organised for the benefit of all. They must be used to lighten labour and to diffuse plenty. Labour must be recognised as the measure of value, and machinery as its servant. But this could not be if the owner of capital controlled the machine for his own profit. All production, therefore, must be socially organised, and capital made the servant of social labour. The workers must aim, not at the destruction of machinery or industrialism, but at its control by the power of association.

Cobbett sought to use the reform of Parliament as a means to his economic ideal. Owen was distrustful of political methods for the achievement of economic ends. He believed in voluntary association of the people as the instrument of social change. While Cobbett led the political Reformers, Owen, as we shall see, became a great influence on Trade Union and Co-operative development.

We saw that, in the period of distress after 1815, Owen, known hitherto only as a great and benevolent employer, an ardent advocate of factory reform, and a pioneer of education, came forward with a plan for the employment of the poor on useful work. He was, at this time, in favour with the Government and the governing classes; for he was no Radical, and still actually opposed political reform, and few had realised that his economic doctrines were far more subversive than the most Radical political programme. His plan for the formation of "Villages of Co-operation" in which the unemployed would be set to social production, mainly on the land, but with auxiliary manufactures, was at first seriously taken up by many upper-class people. But gradually its subversive character became clearer, and it was seen that it struck at the root of the whole profit-making system, and that Owen meant it, not as a mere measure of relief for the unem-

ployed, but as the basis of a wholly new industrial order. His supporters began to fall away, and his fellow-employers to organise strong opposition to his plan. At this stage, he alienated further support by a vigorous attack on organised religions as the greatest sustaining forces of an evil social system. Within a few years he lost nearly all his rich friends ; but, as these fell away, their place was taken by working-class converts to his doctrine.

Indeed, Owenism exactly suited the younger generation of intelligent workmen who were growing up inside the new industrial order, and learning to accept industrialism itself as inevitable. They seized hold of Owen's doctrine of Co-operation, and made it the basis of a new working-class gospel. Owen, with his abounding faith in the power of reason and goodwill, had appealed to the rich to free the poor from their dominion, and to start the new system and teach the workers to govern themselves. The younger workers, who saw that the rich were quite unmoved by these appeals, did not see why they should not, by association, make the new order for themselves. Owen still mistrusted their power, without education, to win or exercise control. They felt more confidence in the ability of their class.

From 1817 to 1823 Owen was ceaselessly active in preaching his new gospel. But he still addressed himself chiefly to the educated and the well-to-do. In 1824, seeing that the ruling classes in Great Britain would do nothing, he made up his mind to test his doctrines in the less contaminated atmosphere of the New World. In America he founded New Harmony, the first of his unsuccessful experiments in the making of Co-operative Communities.

The story of New Harmony falls outside the scope of this book. What is important here is that it caused Owen to be almost continuously away from Great Britain during the years 1824–1829. Working-class Owenism thus developed in the absence of its inspirer. The first Owenite Society—the London Co-operative and Economic Society—and the first Owenite newspaper—*The Economist*—had been founded in 1821 by George Mudie, but in neither had Owen himself any direct share. In his absence Co-operative Societies and newspapers increased and multiplied. William Thompson, the greatest of his disciples, published in 1824 his " Principles of the Distribution of Wealth," and followed this

up with other works expounding Owenism in detail and giving practical guidance for the formation of Co-operative Societies. The London Co-operative Society, with William Lovett, later a Chartist leader, as store-keeper, was founded as an actual trading ociety in 1826, and in 1828 Dr. William King, of the Brighton Co-operative Society, started *The Co-operator*—best and most influential of the movement's early periodicals. When Owen came back to England in 1829 he found a working-class movement, based on his doctrines, strongly established and in process of rapid growth.

To the later developments of Owenism we shall return ; but here we have to follow up certain other influences which, in the decade 1820–1830, were giving shape to the rising consciousness of the new working class. Since the days of Adam Smith political economy had become a great social power, and its alleged laws had come to command an almost religious devotion. Adam Smith's successors, Malthus and Ricardo, had elaborated and systematised his doctrine, and the rapid development of industrialism had given their writings a powerful sanction. The economists became, even against their own intention, the apologists of things as they were ; it became their appointed mission to demonstrate to the poor, with scientific irrefutability, the virtues and blessings of machine-production and the wage-system. Political economy, the " dismal science," was called upon to justify every abuse of industrialism, by throwing over it the glamour of scientific inevitability, and holding out the promise of progress to all who ceased to kick against its laws.

This applies, of course, not so much to Malthus and Ricardo as to those who sought to use their doctrines in order to preach the lesson of acquiescence to the workers. Ricardo actually gave his support to Owen's proposals for the employment of the poor, and Malthus was, in private life, by no means the monster he appeared to Cobbett. But politicians, employers, and a host of lesser economists used Political Economy as a form of Capitalist propaganda. By its means, they sought to prove to the poor that low wages were fixed by an iron law, that Trade Unionism and legislation were alike powerless to amend working-class conditions, and that the best hope for the worker lay in a thankful acceptance of his lot. Middle-class Radicals, followers of Bentham and James Mill, were as intent as hard-headed business men in seeking to

combat " Socialist " ideas with the immutable laws of orthodox Political Economy. Even Francis Place was as " orthodox " in his economics as Ricardo.

Propaganda bred counter-propaganda. It was an accepted assumption of Adam Smith and Ricardo that the source of value was to be found in labour. The measure of the value of commodities was the quantity of labour incorporated in them. As this view was stated by Smith, " labour " included the labour of the capitalist and the service of his capital, as well as the manual work done by hired labourers. As it was stated by Ricardo, labour included the " stored labour " with which capital was identified as well as the present output of manual effort. In both cases the doctrine left intact the claim of the capitalist to share in the product of labour—a claim, indeed, which it had not occurred to either writer to question. But in the decade from 1820 to 1830 those who were in revolt against Capitalism naturally sought an economic doctrine with which to combat the orthodox Political Economy of the dominant classes. They seized on this theory of value and made it into a weapon against Capitalism. In their hands, the labour, which is the source of all value, becomes the productive labour of the wage-worker, and upon this theory is raised his claim to the appropriation of the product, and a repudiation of the claim of the capitalist to interest or profit.[1]

We can see this theory taking form and substance in the years after 1820. " Piercy Ravenstone " (who may have been William Hazlitt) struck some hard blows at the orthodox economists in his " Doubts as to the Correctness of some Opinions Generally Entertained on the Subject of Political Economy " (1821). In the same year, Owen's " Report to the County of Lanark," by far the best of his economic writings, plainly enunciated the Socialist form of the labour theory of value. This " Report " furnished Marx with invaluable suggestions for his theory. Two years later, Thomas Hodgskin came to London from Scotland, and began his series of lectures which took shape in " Labour Defended " (1825) and " Popular Political Economy " (1827). John Gray, William Thompson and many other writers, were working simultaneously

[1] The specific form of Ricardo's theory, which makes circulating capital (*i.e.*, primarily wage-labour) the sole creator of value, lends itself to this Socialist deduction, which was subsequently the basis of Marx's theory of surplus value.

along the same lines. Some recognised a modified Capitalist claim to reasonable interest without control; some recognised no Capitalist claim at all. Some, like Thompson and Owen, were Co-operative Socialists; Hodgskin was rather an anarchist successor of Godwin; and Ravenstone rather an anti-capitalist Tory. Common to them was the repudiation of orthodox economic doctrines, and the exaltation of the virtue and value of labour.

Thus two rival sets of economic doctrines, each purporting to explain industrialism, were competing for the allegiance of the working class. Orthodox Political Economy speedily stepped down from its academic throne in order to combat the new doctrines. Both sides sought to capture the minds of the people. The conflict gave the first powerful stimulus to the movement for adult working-class education.

About 1800, Dr. George Birkbeck, then a teacher at the Glasgow Andersonian Institution, had begun giving courses of scientific lectures to working men. He left Glasgow in 1804; but the "Mechanics' Class" survived him. Until 1823 they continued to use the Andersonian Institution as a centre; but in that year a quarrel occurred and the working-class students split off and founded the Glasgow Mechanics' Institution as an independent body, financed wholly by their own contributions. At almost the same time, Thomas Hodgskin, and a journalist named J. C. Robertson, started in London the *Mechanics' Magazine*, and began to urge the formation of a Mechanics' Institution in London. This brought them into touch with Birkbeck, who had been elected patron of the Glasgow Institution, though he was living in London. With the aid of Francis Place, and other middle and working-class Radicals, this group in 1823 brought the London Mechanics' Institution into being.

But there were two different views among its founders as to the lines along which it should be run. Hodgskin and Robertson, backed by Cobbett, were all for a purely working-class Institution, entirely supported by working-class money. Birkbeck and Place, who were both members of the Benthamite Utilitarian circle, were equally intent on securing middle-class help. Behind this difference was a further issue. Hodgskin, as we have seen, was a pioneer of the new anti-capitalist economics; Birkbeck and Place were orthodox followers of Malthus and Ricardo. Hodgskin

wanted the Institution to be the means of spreading " Socialist " doctrine as well as a technical institution ; Birkbeck wanted it to be mainly technical, but also to base itself on an acceptance of the truths of orthodox Political Economy.

A struggle at once developed for the control of the Institution. Robertson was driven from the position of secretary, and a new paper was started in opposition to the *Mechanics' Magazine*. Hodgskin was indeed allowed to go on lecturing ; but the Institution soon passed entirely into the hands of Birkbeck and his friends, who had provided the greater part of the money for its development. It became Birkbeck College, and remains to-day as a constituent " school " of the University of London.

In the years after 1820, Mechanics' Institutions were rapidly founded in town after town, mostly under the auspices of the middle-class Radicals. Henry (afterwards Lord) Brougham—Lord Chancellor in the Reform Government of 1830–1832—took a very active part in the movement, which became a powerful instrument in familiarising the workers with the doctrines of Political Economy and the technical achievements of the Industrial Revolution. Directly, the influence of the Mechanics' Institutions was undoubtedly against Socialism and towards the acceptance of orthodox economics. But they did much to stimulate discussion and kindle working-class interest, and they often applied the stimulus for the organisation of counter-activities by the working-class bodies. Their development had a good deal to do with the educational activity of the Working-class Movement in the following decade.

The Owenites, like the economists, were great educators. Education was, indeed, the keystone of Owen's Socialist system as well as of his factory experiment at New Lanark. Every Owenite Society carried on educational work, for adults as well as children, as an integral part of its activity. Thus the advocates of orthodox and unorthodox economic doctrines were equally keen on working-class education, though they meant it to serve different ends. This, however, was only among Radicals. Tories and Whigs, for the most part, continued to denounce all plans for educating the workman " above his station," even when the object was to bring him to an awareness of the truths of orthodox economics. Even Hannah More and the Evangelicals, who wished to

limit education for the poor to study of the Scriptures, were often denounced as teachers of dangerous doctrine.

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II

The Repeal of the Combination Acts

The gradual return of prosperity in the years after 1820 did much to alleviate the distress in the manufacturing districts ; and this, even more than the rise of organisation and the appeals of the Radicals for an orderly and disciplined movement, accounted for the return to a comparative tranquillity. Exceptional measures of repression were allowed gradually to lapse ; the activities of spies were relaxed ; and the law was set less freely in motion against working-class attempts at combination. As panic subsided, a mood of greater tolerance began. The power of middle-class Radicalism, directed, as we have seen, largely to educational work, increased ; it became easier to conceive of reform as something different from revolution.

This change of temper prepared the way for the repeal of the drastic laws against working-class Combination, which had been passed in the period of panic after the Nore mutiny of 1797 and the rising of the United Irishmen. The Combination Acts had been part of the general system of repressive legislation passed in these years ; and, as long as the mood which caused them lasted there was no chance of their repeal. Accordingly, while their injustice was often denounced, there was no organised movement either among the workers or among the parliamentary Radicals for their abrogation. Francis Place, the " Radical breeches-maker " of Charing Cross, who had been a journeyman but had become an employer and wirepuller-in-chief to the Westminster Radicals, began to work for repeal as early as 1814 ; but he had practically no following until, after 1820, the unrest among the workers appeared to be dying down.

Then at last Place began to find supporters who not only held that the Acts ought to be repealed, but believed repeal to be politically practicable. He enlisted the Radical M.P., Joseph Hume, and the economist, J. R. McCulloch, then editor of the *Scotsman*,

and secured the full backing of the Benthamite group. At the same time Gravener Henson, leader of the frame-work knitters, who may even have been the inspirer of the Luddite movement, began working along the same lines, with the support of Peter Moore, M.P., and of George White. But Place soon elbowed this group out of the way, regarding their proposals as impracticable, and trusting for success to his own matchless power of pulling wires behind the scenes.

The story of the manœuvres by which Place and Hume, in 1824, secured the unconditional repeal of the Combination Acts has been told again and again. First Hume secured the appointment of a Commons Committee of Enquiry ; then he packed the Committee with his friends. The design to repeal the laws against combination was covered up by coupling it with the repeal of other laws against emigration and the export of machinery. The witnesses were selected, drilled and stage-managed by Place, who provided Hume with a full brief for their examination. Place drafted the Report in the form of a series of resolutions, and Hume wangled it through a committee which was barely conscious of what it was doing. When the official draftsman's Bills, based on the Report, failed to meet Place's wishes, he substituted others, apparently without most of the members knowing the difference. Entirely without debate, and without most of the Cabinet knowing what had happened, the Bill became law. The Acts against working-class combination were completely repealed.

But, if the politicians were unaware of the event, the working-class leaders were quite aware of it. At once the Trade Unions came out into the open and began to organise forward movements. Prices had been rising, and, despite prosperous trade, wages had lagged behind. In 1824 and 1825 there was a great outburst of strikes in many occupations, and especially a great strike of the textile workers in Scotland.

This was not at all what Place and Hume had expected. They had argued for the repeal on the plea that it would lead to a great diminution of strikes, if not to an entire disappearance of combination. Place believed as firmly as Ricardo in the iron law of wages, and as firmly as Malthus in the necessary tendency of population to keep wages down to subsistence level. The laws against combination, he held, encouraged Trade Unions and strikes

by preventing the workers from realising their powerlessness to affect the rates of wages. Their hardships, really due to economic laws, they attributed to oppressive legislation. But give them freedom to combine, and they would realise the futility of all combinations more ambitious than the little friendly societies of journeymen belonging to a particular trade.

This, however, was not the workers' view. They looked to their new freedom to secure them higher wages, and to the strike as the means of forcing the employers' hands. Place and Hume managed to restrain some of the Unions by pointing out that the probable effect of precipitate strikes would be the re-enactment of the laws just repealed. But they could not prevent a sufficient movement to fill the employers with alarm. The shipowners and shipbuilders especially began to press the Government vigorously to replace the repealed laws by a new measure which would prohibit all raising of funds by bodies of workmen save under licence from a magistrate, who must also agree to act as treasurer and to control the expending of such funds. This proposal was plainly far more drastic than the old Combination Acts, in that it struck equally at Friendly Societies, political and social clubs, and every form of working-class association.

The workers, alive to their danger, formed defence associations in the various towns—forerunners of the Trades Councils of later days. They combined to send delegates and petitions to London to oppose any change in the law, and they worked up a national agitation throughout the country. The Government, however, pressed on, under the influence of the big employers. A new parliamentary Committee was appointed to inquire into the working of Hume's Act and to propose any necessary changes, and this committee was packed as carefully by the Government as Hume's had been by the friends of repeal. Hume himself, however, could not be excluded ; and once more he and Place set to work. The committee did not propose to hear any working-class witnesses ; but, under Place's management the Trade Unions showered in petitions and filled the corridors round the committee-room with delegates clamouring to be heard in answer to the charges made against them. At length a few were heard.

By these means the proposals of the Government and the employers were gradually whittled down. But Hume and Place

could not prevent some part of their work from being undone. Carrying the battle into both Houses of Parliament, they secured amendments to the new Bill based on the Committee's report. But in the end it fell, in several important respects, short of what had been secured the previous year. As we have seen, prosecutions against workers who struck or combined were launched, before 1824, sometimes under the Combination Acts, but also sometimes, on a charge of conspiracy, under the common law. The Act of 1824 had been designed as far as possible to give immunity from both types of prosecution ; that of 1825 gave no protection against charges of conspiracy. It merely legalised combinations for dealing with questions of wages and hours, and, at the same time, hedged round the concession with fresh penalties against " intimidation, molestation, or obstruction," or any attempt to " coerce " either employers or fellow-workmen. It remained, indeed, lawful to form Trade Unions, but under conditions which made it very difficult for any body of workers to take effective action without incurring penalties either under statute or under common law.

Thus there were many prosecutions of workers after 1825 for virtually the same offences as while the Combination Acts were in force. Nevertheless, the victory was substantial ; for the mere fact of combination could no longer be treated as a crime, and it became possible for Trade Unions to maintain an open and continuous existence. The decade from 1824 to 1834 saw the foundation of fully constituted Trade Unions in a very large number of trades ; and many combinations which had previously disguised themselves as Friendly Societies, or kept up a secret and intermittent activity, came out into the open and adopted proper codes of rules. The Steam Engine Makers' Society and the London Shipwrights' Association in 1824, the Northumberland and Durham Colliers' Union in 1825, the Journeymen Steam Engine Makers in 1826, the Friendly Society of Carpenters and Joiners (later the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners) in 1827, are only a few of the many Trade Unions constituted, or reconstituted, as a direct result of the repeal of the Combination Acts.

The strike movement of 1824–25 was launched at a time of good trade and rising prices, behind which wages had lagged. But at the end of 1825 came a financial crisis, followed by a slump

in trade. The workers found themselves no longer pressing for advances, but more often resisting reductions in wages. In Lancashire, where the power-loom was now coming into general use, there were widespread riots, and much machinery was destroyed. There were also strikes among the colliers as well as the textile workers, and a second attempt was made to create a General Union of all trades, with its headquarters in Manchester (1826). In 1825 John Gast, the shipwright, had started, in London, the Metropolitan Trades Committee, chiefly in order to mobilise working-class opinion against the attempt to reimpose the laws against combination. This body had started the *Trades' Newspaper*, the first journal actually owned and conducted by an organised body of Trade Unionists. It lasted for some years, and was a powerful influence on the side of general working-class solidarity. The ground was being rapidly made ready for the more ambitious attempts at mass Trade Unionism described in the next chapter.

The story of the repeal of the Combination Acts has usually been told as if it had been entirely the product of Francis Place's genius for successful pulling of wires. Place's own story, which conveys this impression, has been accepted without question. In fact, Place undoubtedly deserves great credit for his work ; and it was certainly he who inspired Hume and the Radicals in Parliament to take the matter up seriously, and he who marshalled the working-class forces in support of the claim. But Place's wire-pulling succeeded in 1824–25, whereas it had failed earlier, because the conditions were then ripe for repeal. That the question was in the air is shown by the fact that another M.P., Peter Moore, prompted by another working-class leader, Gravener Henson, had also drafted a Bill for repeal, as well as by references to the question by Cobbett and other Radicals. The prohibition of all forms of combination was a panic measure, never fully enforced, and only to be maintained in face of a common belief that the working class was bent on revolution. When, after 1820, the unrest appeared to be dying down, and some of the emergency measures were allowed to lapse, it was difficult for believers in *laissez faire* to argue that the Combination Acts ought to be retained. It was, moreover, generally believed, even by Place and many other Radicals, that combination was chiefly fostered

by being repressed, and that freedom of combination would soon teach the workers its futility for all save quite modest and inoffensive objects. This view was not shared by all representatives of the new capitalism, or acquiesced in by those who regarded all popular combinations as acts of disloyalty to the classes appointed by God to rule ; but it was strongly enough held to carry the day in a Parliament where Radicals and old-fashioned gentry could still sometimes combine to teach the new cotton-lords a lesson. Place's wire-pulling was invaluable ; but it was not the basis of the movement for repeal.

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III

The Reform Movement

Meanwhile the movement for the reform of Parliament was speedily gathering force. The House of Commons up to 1832 not only made no pretence of being a democratic body, but was hardly, in any ordinary sense of the word, a representative assembly. The most that could be claimed for it was that it "virtually represented" the classes which had a stake in the country —in other words, that it represented property rather than persons. The distribution of seats bore no proportion either to population or even to the number of electors. In 1780, the ninety-two members for the counties were returned by 130,000 voters—the county freeholders; whereas the 421 members who sat for towns and universities were returned by only 84,000 electors. Moreover, whereas the county elections did, in most cases, give at least the gentry some opportunity of expressing their views, the majority of the borough elections were pure farce. A very few boroughs, such as Westminster and Preston, had a wide franchise and a large body of working-class voters; but many more had their members chosen by a corrupt corporation or a small body of "freemen," or were wholly under the control of some great peer or landowner. The newer towns, such as Manchester, were entirely unrepresented; and many so-called boroughs which returned two members had long shrunk to villages or even to a mere house or two, maintained for the sole purpose of preserving the right of election. Many boroughs were "rotten"; and many were "proprietary," so that the right to represent them could be bought and sold like any other piece of property. "Borough for sale" was a familiar advertisement in the newspapers of the time.

The shifting of population and the growth of new towns during the Industrial Revolution made this "virtual representation" still more unreal. Cornwall had forty-four members, whereas Lan-

cashire had fourteen, and all Scotland only forty-five. Yorkshire returned twenty-eight borough members, but the average electorate per member was only 250. In 1793 there were fifty-one constituencies with less than fifty voters, and 130 with less than 300.

This extraordinary system, practically unreformed for centuries, obviously lent itself to every form of bribery and corruption. Where the borough-owner treated his rights as a form of property, the mere voter obviously did the same with his vote. Votes, as well as proprietary seats, were freely bought and sold. Elections were exceedingly expensive, and only rich men could afford to become candidates unless they were heavily subsidised. The constituencies with a wide franchise fell in with the common practice of selling votes. Save in exceptional cases, the only real elections were contests more of bribery than of opinion. Radicals and Reformers, as much as reactionaries, had to bribe or buy their way into Parliament.

Nevertheless, the system was strongly defended on the ground, not that it was logical, but that it produced the best results, by placing power securely in the hands of those classes which were the backbone of the country. It secured the ascendancy of the great territorial families ; but it did not close the door to the rich merchant or financier, or nabob from India, who could afford to purchase a seat. Until the idea that the vote was a common popular right spread, in the latter half of the eighteenth century,[1] there appeared nothing shocking in the " unrepresentative " character of the electoral machine. The system worked, and put the right people into power. The chief criticism against it came from the landowning classes, who desired to increase county representation, and decrease the royal influence, which was all-powerful in many of the boroughs.

As we have seen, the Reform Movement, which arose between 1769 and 1780, was crushed by the terrors aroused by the Revolution in France. Thenceforth all proposals for reform were denounced as Jacobinism—the first steps towards a complete destruction of British institutions, which would inevitably end in the tearing-up of all property rights and the triumph of Republi-

[1] The idea had, of course, been preached in the seventeenth century, especially under the Commonwealth. But it had almost died out in the Augustan Age which followed the Whig Revolution of 1688.

canism and Revolution. The Reform agitation, recovering slowly during the later years of the Napoleonic wars, only came to command widespread support in the troublous period which followed the Peace. Thereafter it gradually gathered force until it came to a head in the decisive struggle which issued in the Reform Act of 1832.

We are concerned with this struggle here only in so far as it enters into the history of the Working-class Movement. The workers were by no means the only class which had reason to object to the unreformed Parliament. While the rich merchant or financier could find a seat in the House of Commons and climb into the governing class—this openness of the English aristocracy to the infusion of mercantile elements had been for centuries the greatest source of its strength—the growing body of industrial employers and tradesmen found itself, for the most part, excluded and unrecognised. The rapidly increasing middle-classes had no share in political power ; the great towns in which they lived were grossly under-represented, or not represented at all, in the House of Commons. The tenant farmers had no share in the county franchise. And all this body of middle opinion, strongly imbued with the idea of its own growing importance, was becoming more and more critical of corruption and inefficiency in high places. The small employer who, by scraping and saving, raised himself to affluence, keenly resented the spendthrift habits of the older rich, and their little way of helping themselves, by pensions, and sinecures, out of the public purse. The sharp rise in the taxes, due largely to war spending and the War Debt, roused a vigorous demand for economy and " business government."

At the same time, the demand for Universal Suffrage, as one of the " Rights of Man," had by no means spent the force acquired under the influence of revolutionary thought. Bentham and his followers, indeed, pooh-poohed the rights of man, and argued for Universal Suffrage on utilitarian grounds of common sense ; but Major Cartwright's agitation, and the continued popularity of Paine's writings, kept the doctrine alive in its more revolutionary form. Cartwright, and still more Paine, doubtless appealed chiefly to the working class ; but both Cartwright and Cobbett had also a large following among the smaller middle class, while Cobbett had, in addition, great influence with many of the farmers as well as with the labourers and artisans.

The Reform Movement from 1815 to 1832 was, indeed, essentially a popular movement in which the main body of the working class found itself in temporary alliance with the rising middle classes of the industrial towns. Naturally the latter, who had already some parliamentary influence, tended, in the main, to assume the leadership. Cobbett and Hunt, the outstanding men with influence among the workers, were both countrymen and farmers, not artisans. Gast, Lovett, Benbow, Doherty, and the other working-class leaders occupied only a secondary position. In Parliament the leader of the extreme Radicals was the millionaire Sir Francis Burdett. But none of these men really controlled the strategy of the Reform Movement. From the time when the Whig Party took up the question, the movement passed into the hands of those middle-class elements which were prepared to accept Whig leadership. Henry Brougham counted for more than Burdett in Parliament; and most of the local Reform Associations and Political Unions were mainly dominated by middle-class men of substance. Their attitude, even when it was Radical, was far more influenced by Benthamism than by the Rights of Man.

But these different groups of Reformers, however varying their real aims might be, were at least united in desiring a reform of Parliament. They tended, therefore, especially in the earlier stages of the campaign, to work together without too close a scrutiny of one another's principles. They could all demand Reform without defining too particularly what they meant. And they could all seize occasions for putting the opponents of Reform in an awkward predicament. The political importance of the famous case of Queen Caroline lay largely in this, that the defence of the Queen against the King could be turned into an attack on George IV. and his anti-Reform Ministers. Brougham and Denman, on the one hand, and Cobbett, on the other, were equally enthusiastic in the Queen's defence. The same bodies as passed republican resolutions one day sent "loyal addresses" to the Queen the next. Loyalty to the Queen became a form of disloyalty to the King and Constitution.

The Queen Caroline case is mentioned here because it was an important factor in giving the Reform movement a popular backing. Organised by Cobbett, a great working-class agitation sprang up in the Queen's support; and this, when the case was over,

swung itself into the Reform Movement. The creation by Daniel O'Connell and his friends of the Catholic Association in Ireland (1823) was another great encouragement to the Reformers, and Irish oppression was used as a stick to beat the Government. Irishmen were active in every section of the Radical Movement in Great Britain, and especially in the working-class societies in the older towns. The struggle which led to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 did a great deal to dissolve the solidity of the Tories and to prepare the way for the return of the Whig Party to power, under conditions which made parliamentary reform inevitable.

Events abroad also influenced the growth of the movement. The Spanish Revolution of 1820 and the Greek Revolution of 1821 aroused widespread sympathy, while the French and Belgian Revolutions of 1830 were among the chief causes which precipitated the crisis of 1830–1832.

In 1830 the Whigs came back to power, and their leader, Grey, at once announced that parliamentary reform would be the chief item in their policy. But what sort of reform ? The Whig leaders were by temperament fully as aristocratic as the Tories, and had certainly no intention of using their power to institute a democratic system. The Reform Bill which they introduced actually went further than most people had expected, sweeping away the whole system of rotten boroughs, redistributing seats more in accordance with population, and extending the franchise to practically the whole of the middle class. But it left the manual workers almost wholly voteless, and even took away the votes they had possessed in a few boroughs having an exceptionally wide suffrage. At once the advocates of Universal Suffrage, and especially the working-class bodies which had been pressing for reform, had to decide upon their attitude to the Whig measure. Should they support it as a blow at the old order, and at least a step towards the new ? Or should they oppose it as merely an attempt to substitute for the domination of the landowning aristocracy the even more hostile rule of the industrial capitalists ?

In 1830 this issue was being debated in every Radical society in which the workers formed an important element. Generally, following Cobbett's lead, the main body of the workers backed the Bill, while declaring their distrust of the Whigs and reiterating

their demand for a really democratic measure. But there was a left wing which denounced the Whig Bill, and refused to play any part in supporting a measure of " treason to the working class." Henry Hunt, who had been elected to Parliament in 1830 as Member for Preston, though he voted for the Bill, roundly denounced it in the House and moved many Radical amendments, which were, of course, overwhelmingly defeated.

The first Reform Bill was beaten in Committee in the House of Commons. An excited General Election followed, and gave the Reformers a big majority. A second Bill passed the Commons, only to be beaten in the House of Lords.

The excitement was by this time tremendous ; and the working-class Radicals were swung into the agitation, which had clearly become a national trial of strength. Great meetings were held all over the country ; the Political Unions threatened to withhold all taxes until the Bill was passed. At Bristol rioters held the city for several days, sacking the gaols, the Mansion House, and the Bishop's Palace. Derby gaol was sacked, and Nottingham Castle burnt down. In London the King was hustled, and the windows of noted anti-Reformers were broken. A third Reform Bill passed the Commons, and was thrown out by the Lords. Grey asked the King for power to create peers, and was refused. He resigned, and the Duke of Wellington tried to form a ministry, with the object of passing, against his own convictions, a Reform Bill going just far enough to divide the Reformers. The Duke failed, and Grey was recalled to power. At the close of a year of unprecedented excitement, the Lords gave way and passed the Bill. At the beginning of 1832 it received the Royal Assent, and became law.

It had been impossible for the working-class bodies, in face of the opposition encountered by the Whig Bill, to press their own claim for a more far-reaching measure. They could only join in the popular cry for " the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill," and prevent it from being whittled down by further compromise with the opponents of Reform. Thus the identity of the working-class groups appeared for the time to be submerged in the general agitation. But the struggle was, none the less, a big factor in rousing the political consciousness of the workers and preparing the way for the independent working-class political programme of the Chartists.

We can see this independent political movement beginning to develop during the years of agitation. In 1828 the London Irish had organised an Association for Civil and Political Liberty, and in 1829 this had developed into a Society for Radical Reform, supported by most of the advanced working-class Radicals in London. This in turn became, in 1830, the National Union of the Working Classes, the body which chiefly preserved left-wing Radical opinion during the critical years of the Reform struggle, and survived long enough to be the direct ancestor of working-class Chartism. In the provinces, the workers were mostly attached to the Political Unions, which were largely under middle-class leadership; but the N.U.W.C. was in close touch with the more Radical elements in these Unions, and, when the National Political Union was formed in 1831 to unite the local bodies, the working-class elements were strong enough to secure half the seats on its Council.

The Reform Act was carried chiefly by working-class agitation, and by the threat of a revolution in which the workers would have played the leading part. But it left the workers voteless and detached from them the main body of middle-class support on which they had previously relied. The middle classes obtained, in 1832, their share in political power. They had only to use their opportunities in order to ensure in the long run that their interests should dominate national policy. The vast majority of the middle class accordingly dropped out of Radical agitation, and the temporary alliance of middle and working classes was broken. As we shall see, attempts were made to revive it later, and in the end a new alliance was made in the Liberal-Labour compromise of the mid-Victorian period. But for the time the " betrayal " of 1832 —as it was widely regarded—left the workers angry and disillusioned. They had won the battle, they felt, and yet they had none of the fruits of victory. They were left in a mood to try what they could do by their unaided efforts against a combination of the old and new ruling classes. We shall find them, in the next chapter, turning to industrial action in their mood of political disillusionment. And then we shall see them, having met defeat in the industrial field, turning back to politics, there to meet with a no less crushing disaster. For the new governing class created in 1832 was far stronger, and rested on a far broader national

basis, than the old. After 1832 the leading poachers turned game-keepers. Cobbett, elected to the Reformed Parliament, found himself fighting the new power as fiercely as ever he had fought the old.

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CHAPTER VI

REVOLUTIONARY TRADES UNIONISM

1. Trades Unionism—The Labourers' Revolt
2. The Rise of Owenism
3. The Operative Builders
4. The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union

I

Trades Unionism—The Labourers' Revolt

The culminating years of the Reform agitation were also the years during which a mass industrial movement of the workers began to take shape. Politically, the workers were compelled during this time to accept the leadership of the middle-classes, and to support the agitation for the Whig Reform Bill. But industrially they were under no such compulsion. The crisis of 1825 was followed by a period of bad trade and irregular employment. This arrested the strike movement which followed the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824. But by 1829 there had been a recovery, and the Unions, now able to organise openly under the law, were in a position to resume their forward movement. In 1829, the year of Catholic Emancipation and the year before the return of the Whigs to power, arose the great Trade Union agitation which culminated in the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of 1834.

The movement began in the great textile districts in the north of England. In January, 1829, the Stockport spinners struck against an attempted reduction in wages. In April the Manchester fine spinners followed them, and in July the rest of the Manchester spinners came out. The Stockport men, their funds exhausted, had to return to work in June, and in October, after a vain attempt to secure arbitration, the Manchester men also went back to work. But these defeats, instead of causing discouragement, provided the incentive to stronger organisation. In December, 1829, under the leadership of John Doherty, a National Spinners' Conference of delegates from England, Scotland, and Ireland met in the Isle of Man and founded the Grand General Union of All the Operative Spinners of the United Kingdom, the first really national Trade Union of the modern type.

Doherty, an Irishman from Ulster and a Catholic, was the most influential Trade Unionist of his time. Migrating to Manchester

in 1817, he had speedily become the leading figure in Trade Union circles there. He had helped to organise the movement against the Combination Acts, and, as secretary of the Manchester Spinners, had been the leader of the strike of 1829. He was, moreover, a man of ideas, a keen Owenite and a prominent figure in the agitation for factory reform. The great Spinners' Union of which he became secretary, was, in his mind, only part of a far more ambitious project. We have seen that an attempt had been made in Manchester, in 1826, to form a General Union of all trades. We can hardly be wrong in putting this down largely to Doherty's influence. At all events, he proceeded at once to follow up his success with the spinners by launching a plan for a general co-ordinated movement of the whole working class, and he was modern enough to desire that this should ultimately take shape in a general political, as well as a general industrial, organisation, each section managing its own affairs.

In March, 1830, Doherty started the *United Trades' Co-operative Journal*—the name is a clear indication of Owenite influence—as the herald of the wider movement. In July, 1830, he succeeded in launching the National Association for the Protection of Labour, and thus realised his project of " General Union." He resigned his secretaryship of the Spinners and became secretary to the new body, on whose behalf he at once instituted a great organising campaign in the northern counties. At the same time he was working energetically with Richard Oastler, John Fielden, and other factory reformers, in the " Ten Hours " Movement, and establishing " Short Time " Committees throughout the textile districts to press the case for Sadler's Factory Bill, then before Parliament.

Meanwhile the Spinners' Union had become involved in a big series of strikes for increased wages. Their policy was to avoid a large-scale conflict, and to attack the employers one by one. This led to reprisals ; and in November, 1830, the masters in Stalybridge, Ashton and Dukinfield declared a general lock-out. The Union retaliated by calling a general strike over Lancashire ; but in many places the men remained at work. Some disturbances followed, and in one of these a mill-owner was killed. Gradually the men's resistance was beaten down and they were compelled to return to work. But the Union, though weakened, was not

broken. It survived to play its part in the events of the next few years. The Scottish and Irish sections, however, seem to have broken away in the course of the struggle of 1830.

The fruits of Doherty's organising work were soon apparent. Twenty trades had been represented at the inaugural meeting of the N.A.P.L., and soon the number of affiliated societies rose to about 150. The strength of the Association lay chiefly among the textile workers, and it spread rapidly from Lancashire into Yorkshire and the textile districts in the Midlands. But soon other trades began to join also. The Potters' Union, centred in Stoke-on-Trent, was organised in 1830 with Doherty's help. Numerous small societies of millwrights, blacksmiths and mechanics came in. A delegate conference of miners from Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Lancashire and Cheshire and North Wales affiliated; and the Derbyshire miners also joined the Association. A new weekly, the *Voice of the People*, was started, and sold 30,000 copies a week, though the price was *7d.* In 1831 the N.A.P.L. claimed a membership of 100,000.

Then apparently came a quarrel, of which no details are known, and the parent section of the Association in Lancashire began to break up. The failure of Lancashire to support a big strike in Nottingham caused the secession of the Nottingham groups. The centre of activity shifted to Yorkshire, and Doherty started, in 1832, a new journal, the *Poor Man's Advocate*, as the organ of the movement. We shall see later how the Yorkshire section, as the "Leeds, Huddersfield and Bradford District Union," held together, and played its part in the movement of 1834. Closely connected with it was the great Clothiers' Union, centred in Leeds, which was also founded, largely through Doherty's efforts, in 1831.

A large number of miners' lodges, we have seen, became connected with the N.A.P.L. In South Wales a Friendly Society of Coal Mining was formed in 1831, and connected itself with Doherty's organisation. But the outstanding miners' movement, in the highly-developed coalfield of Northumberland and Durham, seems to have been independently organised. The colliers in these districts had formed a Union in 1825; but in 1830, under the leadership of "Tommy" Hepburn, this was revived and greatly extended. Some sort of informal pit organisation had long existed

among the miners ; but now they came together in a powerful Union, and drew up a schedule of grievances, announcing that they would refuse to enter into any " bond " until these were remedied. The system of the " yearly bond " was still the prevailing form of wage contract in the mining districts.

The strike of 1831 ended in a victory for the men, the coal-owners making substantial concessions. But in the following year the owners reorganised their forces, and the dispute broke out anew. At about half the pits work continued, and the men paid large levies in support of those involved in the struggle. At the other half the owners declared war on the Union, and began the systematic importation of blacklegs from other districts. This led to violence, which was savagely repressed. After a long resistance, the Union was broken, and the men returned to work on the employer's terms, which included in most cases renunciation of the Union. Hepburn himself, after a long struggle to maintain himself as a hawker, was compelled to give way and to accept employment on these terms. He was a great leader, active in the Reform agitation as well as in Trade Union work. But after 1832 he dropped out of the movement, the men whom he had led not daring, for fear of victimisation, to have any further dealings with him. Hepburn lived on into the 'seventies, but he took no further part in either Trade Unionism or politics. He had given his word in accepting employment, and he kept it.

London was not unaffected by this wave of Trade Unionism which spread over the country about 1830. In 1831 the London workers formed a Metropolitan Trades Union, federating the various separate Societies, and this body entered into relations with Doherty and the N.A.P.L. But, for the most part, the attention of the London workers during the years up to 1832 was concentrated on the Reform struggle, and the political National Union of the Working Classes played a larger part than any purely Trade Union body. Far less affected than the North by the new methods of production, and, as a rule, far better paid, the London artisans tended to take the lead in political rather than industrial organisation.

The South, however, had its full share of the awakening. In the late summer of 1830 began the despairing mass movement in the agricultural districts, which has been described by Mr. and Mrs. Hammond as " the last labourers' revolt." From the

beginning of the century the condition of the rural workers had been growing steadily worse. During the war the sharp rise in prices had brought no corresponding advance in wages, while the speeding-up of enclosures and the new methods of farming had caused a serious decline in the demand for labour. When it became literally impossible for the labourers to live on the customary wages, the farmers and justices, instead of raising wages, pursued the policy of supplementing them out of poor relief—the so-called " Speenhamland system," named after the place at which it was first introduced. Thereafter, over a great part of England, it became the practice for agricultural wages to be made up to subsistence standard by poor relief, varying with the size of the family. The poor rates naturally grew at an alarming rate, and there was strong pressure from farmers and landowners for their reduction. This was attempted, not by raising wages, but by a progressive reduction in the standard of living allowed to the labourers, who were thus steadily forced down to starvation. Moreover, under the poor law a system of bond labour developed, and the unfortunate " paupers " were hired out in gangs, virtually as slaves, to work on the farms or the roads without wages in return for the relief secured from the parish.

For the better carrying out of the policy of beating down the poor rates, many parishes combined under a permissive Act into " Unions," and appointed paid overseers to administer the law. Naturally, these overseers became exceedingly unpopular ; for their business was both to reduce the scales of relief and to deter persons from getting it by every means in their power. Against the overseers the greatest resentment was displayed in the revolt of 1830.

There had been, in the years of distress after 1815 and intermittently ever since, a certain amount of rick-burning, and even rioting, among the half-starved workers in the rural districts. In 1830, under stress of the excitement general throughout the country, these disturbances assumed a more general character. In Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, and a number of other counties, a general revolt developed. In one village after another the labourers, with no previous organisation, threw up leaders out of their own ranks, assumed control of the village, and marched forth to destroy the hated threshing-machines, to burn

the ricks of unpopular farmers or landowners, to demand the remission of tithes and rents and the payment of higher wages, and occasionally to give an unpopular overseer a ducking in the local horse-pond. Apart from this last, there was a complete absence of violence to persons ; in the entire revolt the labourers appear not to have killed or wounded a single person. It is clear that a good many of the farmers sympathised with them, and a few gave them positive help.

The governing classes, however, speedily took fright, and urgent demands were sent to the Government for the suppression of the revolt. The Whigs, who had just assumed office, were intent on proving themselves as doughty champions of law and order as the Tories, and thus disarming opposition to their proposals for Reform. Lord Melbourne, at the Home Office, was as ready to use strong measures against the labourers as he showed himself against Hepburn's Colliers' Union in 1832. Troops were rushed into the affected areas and order was speedily restored, for the unarmed labourers were far too weak even to attempt resistance. Wholesale arrests were made and Special Commissions sent down to try the offenders. Nine persons were hanged, 457 transported, and about 400 more sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. Among those hanged was Henry Cook, of Micheldever, a lad of nineteen, whose chief offence was that he had hit Bingham Baring, the financier, with a stick and severely damaged his hat.

The savage suppression of the revolt—which did not prevent the sporadic continuance of secret rick-burning and machine-breaking—was partly the result of panic, arising in the guilty consciences of the landowners, and partly a Whig demonstration of faith in the sacred rights of property. It aroused fierce resentment among the working-class Radicals, and was a means of arousing their hatred of the reforming Whigs, whom they accused of hypocrisy and betrayal of the poor. Richard Carlile, the Radical journalist, protested vigorously, defending the revolt, and was put in prison. Cobbett, while he did not defend rick burnings, upheld the labourers' cause, and fiercely attacked the Whigs for their brutality. At the King's special instance the Government launched a prosecution against him. But Cobbett was a dangerous man to attack. His defence turned the case into " a trial of the Government more than of Cobbett," and, when the

jury disagreed, the Government was only too glad to drop the prosecution. Order had been restored; too much zeal might provoke a far more formidable revolt. Actually, after the trouble had died down, there was a slight rise in agricultural wages, and the position of the workers was slightly improved. For the moment the "last labourers' revolt" had given the governing classes a salutary fright. But within a few years the new Poor Law of 1834 ended the Speenhamland system without putting an end to the sufferings of the labourers. From 1831, through all the successive waves of industrial and political agitation, there was no important movement among the agricultural workers till the rise of Joseph Arch's Union in the 'seventies. Repression and starvation had done their work; and the more active spirits were steadily drained away to the towns, where they could at least escape from the deadening despair of the village.

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II

The Rise of Owenism

This great growth of Trade Unionism was the opportunity of the Owenite Socialists. For ten years or more the Owenite gospel of Socialism or Co-operation had been making headway among small, but growing, groups of workers up and down the country. At first these groups established only propagandist societies, devoted to education—always a primary matter with the Owenites—and the spread of Co-operative knowledge. They began, however, through these societies, to collect funds with the object of starting self-governing "Villages of Co-operation" on the Owenite principle. Thus the London Co-operative Society, founded in 1824, started a subsidiary Co-operative Fund Association. It also, in 1826, established the *Co-operative Magazine* as the organ of the movement. It had already set up a store for the supply of articles of necessity to its members. James Watson and William Lovett, among the best known of the working-class leaders, were its first and second store-keepers.

The idea of opening shops appealed to these early Co-operators, not so much in itself as in relation to the larger end which they had in view. According to Owen's doctrine, it was the mission of the "productive classes" to supersede Capitalism by Co-operation, and to establish by social action an entirely new system. Owen had looked to the benevolent rich to provide the funds for setting up the new order; his working-class disciples looked mainly to themselves. A store for trading on a Co-operative basis appealed to them, first because it actually superseded one form of competitive trading—distribution—by a method based on Owen's ideas, and secondly, because it afforded the means of raising a fund which could be allowed to accumulate and then applied to the establishment of a Socialist community. Goods could be sold at ordinary trade prices, and the balance saved by cutting out the retailer's profit could be paid into the fund and used for this or other forms of Co-operative enterprise.

There were intermediate stages between mere shopkeeping and the founding of "Villages of Co-operation." Why, it was soon asked, should not the members make for one another instead of buying from the capitalist the goods which they sold in their stores? As the Trade Unions grew after 1825, Owenism began to appeal to them, and especially to the skilled handicraftsmen, who were still an important element in the towns. Groups of workers belonging to a particular craft began to set up Co-operative Societies of a different type—societies of producers which offered their products for sale through the Co-operative Stores. Individual craftsmen, who were Socialists, also brought their products to the Stores to sell. Early in 1830 the London Society opened an Exchange Bazaar for the use of societies and individuals with products for sale or mutual exchange.

Before this the movement, as a whole, had taken a decisive leap forward. In 1827 a group of workers, previously connected with the Brighton Mechanics' Institution, formed, under the guidance of Dr. William King, the Brighton Co-operative Society. This was successful, and other stores and productive associations soon arose out of it. In 1828 Dr. King, feeling the need to give the growing movement a clear lead, began to issue from Brighton the *Co-operator*, a practical and simply written journal of the new system. The *Co-operator* had a great success. It was read all over the country and exerted a big influence. When it ceased publication in 1830 the number of Co-operative Societies had already grown from a dozen or two to 300.

Meantime, in 1829, Robert Owen had recognised the failure of New Harmony, his Co-operative Community in America, and had returned to England. At first he was not quite sure what to make of the movement which his followers had created in his absence, and inclined to mistrust the power of the workers to organise for themselves without the financial help or guidance of the "educated classes." But very soon he was swept into the stream and realised that his ideas had become the basis of a great popular movement. As the founder of the new system, he stepped naturally into a position of leadership.

In 1829 an attempt was made to link up the movement by the foundation of a central body—the British Association for the Promotion of Co-operative Knowledge—with a new journal, the

British Co-operator, as its principal organ. A few months later, Doherty's journal, already mentioned, the *United Trades' Co-operative Journal*, became the organ of the movement in the north of England. Growth was rapid ; in 1832 the number of Co-operative Societies had risen to nearly 500. In 1831 the first national Co-operative Congress met, and attempted to launch a plan—discouraged by Owen as premature—for founding Villages of Co-operation. Thereafter, Congresses met half-yearly in various towns.

This astonishing growth of the Co-operative Movement, running parallel with the Reform agitation, but wholly separate from it, demands further analysis. The Co-operative Societies connected with the movement were of several distinct types. First, there were the purely educational and propagandist bodies, preaching the whole social gospel of Owenism, and including a great many Owenite sympathisers who were not of the working class. These were grouped round the central Owenite body which, passing through many changes of name, was best known as the National Union of the Industrious Classes. Of this group Owen was the unquestioned leader. In 1832 it created a Social Missionary and Tract Society for propaganda on a national scale ; and in many towns the local societies acquired rooms or buildings of their own, which were the centres, not only of their work, but of the whole movement in their localities.

Secondly, there were the Co-operative Stores or Shops, mostly run by enthusiastic Owenites, but occupying an intermediate position. Thirdly, there were, especially from 1830 onwards, the societies of producers, aiming at Co-operative production of goods and looking to the Stores to provide them with a market. These naturally arose first in trades requiring little capital or plant. They appealed especially to craftsmen whose independence was being threatened by the rise of factory production or of sub-contracting through capitalist middlemen.

The most significant feature of the years we are discussing was the rapid rise of this third type of Co-operative Society and the direct entry of the Trade Unions into Co-operative production. Most of these Societies were based directly upon the Unions of their trades, and many of them were actually indistinguishable from these Unions, which took up production as a part of

their Union activity. In London and other towns this led to a further development—the formation of United Trades Associations, which were close federations of the Societies and Unions engaged in Co-operative production. These bodies, and their constituent elements, were not necessarily Owenite or Socialist, in the sense of accepting or understanding the whole Owenite or Socialist gospel. They were bodies of workmen, attracted by the new ideas, and seeking to use them as means of mutual advancement and defence.

Indeed, one of the commonest arguments in favour of these producers' societies was that they could be valuable auxiliaries in the struggle for better conditions. Co-operative production could be set on foot for the employment of members who were out of work, especially in connection with a trade dispute, and by this means the members could maintain themselves instead of becoming a drain on the funds of the Union. This was one of the principal attractions of the proposal to the Trade Unionists ; we find Co-operative production constantly urged as an alternative to strike pay during the troublous times which began in 1830.

It was this third type of Co-operative Society that Owen set out specially to foster when he assumed the leadership of the movement. In it he saw the chance of bringing the rising Trade Unions over to the acceptance of his full Socialist gospel. Owen and the Owenites set out definitely to capture the Trade Unions for Socialism.

As soon as the workers turned to Co-operative production, there arose a far more difficult problem than any that confronted the mere shopkeeping Co-operative Store. The Store bought wholesale what its members needed, and sold it retail. The productive Society had to find somewhere a market for all its products. We have seen how, in 1830, the London Co-operators opened an Exchange Bazaar. But this was on a small scale, and the rapid growth of the movement soon made necessary a bigger agency for sales.

Out of this need arose Robert Owen's National Equitable Labour Exchange, which opened its doors in 1832, and was soon followed by similar Exchanges in Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow, and other centres. The Labour Exchange was designed to enable the various groups of producers to exchange their products

one with another at an equitable valuation, and was also, for the time, to be the means whereby they could reach the wider market of the general public. In 1820, in his famous "Report to the County of Lanark," Owen had put forward the view that, as labour was the sole creator of value,[1] the amount of labour that went to the making of any commodity was the only fair measure of its value or price. The right way, therefore, of pricing goods was to calculate the amount of average human labour-power embodied in them.

This principle, adapted to meet the exigencies of the situation, Owen now sought to apply. Prices in the Exchange were based on the cost price of the raw material, to which was added the sum corresponding to the "socially necessary labour-time" absorbed in production. Differences in current rates of wages were taken as measuring the differing values of differing types of labour. Pricing was done by valuers appointed by the Exchange,[2] and a new currency of Labour Notes was issued for the conduct of transactions.

As soon as the Exchanges were opened the producers' societies began a brisk deposit of goods. These were readily bought, both by Co-operators and by the general public. Owen's Labour Notes for a time not only passed current among members of the movement, but were widely accepted by private shopkeepers in payment for goods. This is not so surprising as it sounds. The age was one in which private note issues made by small banks were a familiar form of currency, and even private employers, in face of the shortage of national currency, had sometimes in emergencies issued their own notes.

For a time all went well. But the Labour Exchange system had obvious weaknesses. It was not easy for labour values and ordinary commercial values to exist side by side. Goods which the Exchange sold for less than the private tradesman were speedily disposed of; goods for which it asked more remained on the shelves. Started originally with Owen's own money, the London Exchange was taken over in 1833 by the London United Trades Association, the federal body uniting the various producers' societies, or "Union Shops," as they were commonly called. It

[1] See p. 84.
[2] For a fuller account see my "Robert Owen," p. 198.

was carried on with apparent success until 1834 ; but by that time business had seriously fallen off, and it went down in the general crash to be described in the next section. The Birmingham Exchange, which also wound up its affairs in 1834, was able to pay all its debts and to present its surplus to the local hospital. But the London Exchange ended with a heavy deficit, which fell on Owen.

1832 was the year, not only of Owen's Labour Exchange, but also of the Builders' Union, which is dealt with in the next section. It saw also the beginning of a new phase in the agitation for factory reform. Hitherto, the workers in the textile districts had been chiefly concerned in pressing for the passing into law of Sadler's Factory Bill, which was designed to establish the Ten Hours Day. But now, under the influence of Doherty, Owen, and John Fielden, the Radical manufacturer, they began to consider the use of industrial action in shortening the hours of work. The idea of the general strike was in the air ; William Benbow had published, in 1831, his pamphlet on the " Grand National Holiday " ; and Owen, in his lectures up and down the country, was steadily insisting that the new powers of production were amply great enough to enable all the world's work to be done in a day of not more than eight hours. Owen and Fielden were calling for a great eight hours movement, backed by the enlightened employers, and taking the form of a concerted refusal, backed, if necessary, by a general stoppage, to work more than eight hours a day. This movement, which greatly annoyed Oastler and other leaders of the Ten Hours agitation, took shape in 1833, in a new organisation largely under Owen's guidance. Doherty, Owen and Fielden launched, in Manchester, the National Regeneration Society, with the eight hours day as the immediate objective, and a great Trade Union agitation spread under its auspices through the northern counties.

Thus, in 1833, Owen was at the head of several distinct, but closely-related, movements commanding working-class enthusiasm and allegiance. The Owenite Societies, the Co-operative Stores, the "Union Shops" or producers' societies, the Labour Exchanges, the Trade Unions, and the National Regeneration Society all looked to him for leadership. The Reform Act had become law, and the great body of workers who had been engrossed

in political agitation was in a mood of disillusionment and hostility towards the victorious middle class. The whole force of working-class opinion swung instinctively towards the industrial movement. Owenism became the gospel of the working class ; political interest was for the time submerged. The way was made ready for the union of all the movements described in this chapter into a single inclusive movement, seeking, by united industrial action, to change the whole basis of society, and even to overthrow Capitalism and establish Socialism by one revolutionary industrial uprising. For a time the centre of interest was the great Operative Builders' Union, which seemed to symbolise the rising power and self-confidence of the " industrious classes."

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III

The Operative Builders

The Operative Builders' Union came into prominence in 1832. The actual date of its foundation is uncertain, but it was probably either 1831 or 1832. Hitherto, the building workers had been organised in a number of separate craft societies, for the most part confined to a single town. The Carpenters and Joiners had, indeed, formed a national society in 1827, and probably one or two other national craft unions were in existence before the O.B.U. was founded. But, if so, these were small and weak. It was with the foundation of a single Union, organising all sections of the industry, that the builders leapt suddenly to the forefront of the Trade Union world. The membership of the new body rose rapidly to 40,000, and seems at one stage to have reached at least 60,000.

At first the Builders' Union directed its efforts to the improvement of wages, the elimination of non-unionists, and the abolition of "general contracting," then beginning widely to replace the older system by which master joiners, master masons, etc., contracted separately for the different jobs involved in erecting a building. In 1832 and 1833 the Union won a number of victories, successfully enforcing the greater part of its demands by local action. Members flocked in, and it became easily the leading Trade Union in the country. Its success caused widespread alarm; the newspapers published leading articles denouncing its "tyranny"; and with victory came wider ambitions and increasing confidence in its power.

Owen was at this time going up and down the country enlisting the Trade Unions in support of his schemes. Naturally, he and his supporters soon turned their attention to the O.B.U. James Morrison, one of the leaders of the Union and an enthusiastic Owenite, started a weekly journal, the *Pioneer*, as its organ, and there preached the virtues of the Owenite system. Owen himself

addressed the builders' lodges and enlisted their support. In collaboration with Morrison and other Owenites, he drafted for the Union a comprehensive programme, which embodied the full acceptance of his schemes. At the Builders' "Parliament," the National Conference of the Union, held at Manchester in September, 1833, he secured the complete adoption of this programme. The greatest Trade Union in the country thus swallowed Owenism whole.

Nor was this merely an acceptance of the Owenite theory. What Owen put before the Builders' "Parliament" was a practical plan of action. He had been persuading many other Unions to embark on Co-operative production by opening "Union Shops" of the type described in the last section. These were appropriate to the small local Unions with which he had usually to deal; but the Builders' Union was a great national organisation, extending over the whole country, and with the great majority of the skilled building workers in its ranks. To it he accordingly proposed a far more ambitious plan. The Builders' Union was not merely to start Co-operative building in competition with the master builders; it was to take over at a blow the entire building industry, and to reorganise it as a Grand National Guild under the direct control of the Union. Master builders, if they had sense, could join the Union and become its servants, subject to election by the members. Those who did not join would be frozen out, because no one would work for them. The Guild itself would employ all its members, paying them a regular salary in work or out, and would undertake to carry through the whole of the building work of the country.

The Union and the Guild were to be, not two separate bodies, but one and the same. For this purpose the Union was to revise its rules, and the craft sections in which it was organised were to surrender their autonomy and come under "universal government." The whole Union was to be organised, no longer for mere bargaining about wages and conditions, but for the direct control and conduct of industry.

So well had the preliminary work of persuasion been done that this plan was enthusiastically accepted by the Builders' "Parliament," and the Executive was instructed to launch the National Guild at once. At Birmingham, where the Owenites were

strongest, plans were at once laid for the building of a great Guildhall, to serve as the headquarters of the Union and a place where educational work could be carried on. Two Owenite architects, Joseph Hanson and Edward Welsh, made the plans and raised the money needed for financing the scheme. Work on the Guildhall was begun in a fever of enthusiasm.

But the master builders were not likely to allow themselves to be superseded without a struggle. After the Union victories of 1832–33 they had set to work to organise with a view to the renewal of the contest, and at the time when the Builders' " Parliament " adopted Owen's scheme a great strike or lock-out was already in progress in the Manchester district, one of the Union's chief strongholds. The masters had made up their minds to break the Union, and to every man involved in the dispute they presented the " document "—a familiar instrument in building conflicts even to our own day—demanding renunciation of all connection with the O.B.U.

Birmingham, too, was the centre of a great lock-out, and disputes soon broke out in other districts as well. The Executive of the O.B.U. found itself facing, with quite inadequate financial resources, a whole series of strikes and lock-outs at the very moment when it was also attempting to reorganise the Union and to launch Owen's ambitious scheme for a National Guild. It had to meet, moreover, a dissentient minority within its own ranks which objected to the system of " universal government " and the adoption by the Union of Socialist aims and policy. This group, known as the " exclusives," demanded the breaking up of the Union into a federation of autonomous craft societies. It was a small group at first ; but it gained ground as the difficulties increased.

Early in 1834 the Manchester men began to give way and to sign the " document " renouncing membership of the Union. The Birmingham employers were also able to carry on with blackleg labour, and there, too, the hold of the Union was weakening. Work on the Guildhall had for a time to be suspended for lack of funds, and was only resumed under great and increasing difficulties. The Guild secured and executed a few small contracts for friendly clients ; but, for the most part, those who wanted to have buildings erected showed no desire to deal with it.

London, the third strong centre of the Union, had hitherto been free from any big dispute. But in the middle of 1834 it, too, became involved. Combe, Delafield and Co., the brewers, placed a ban on Trade Union labour ; and the builders retorted by placing a ban on their beer. Cubitts, the master builders, thereupon forbade the drinking of any beer except Combe, Delafield's on their jobs. The men struck, and the other masters declared a sympathetic lock-out, and presented the now familiar " document " to the men, who replied with a refusal to work with non-unionists. The dispute dragged on for several months ; but here, too, in the end the men were beaten.

These defeats caused a revulsion of feeling, and the " exclusives " rapidly gained ground. In September, 1834, the masons seceded from the Builders' Union, and reconstituted their section of the Union as a separate body. This was followed by other secessions, and towards the end of the year the Operative Builders' Union ceased to exist, and fell apart into its constituent elements. The Carpenters, Stonemasons, Bricklayers, and Plumbers managed to maintain their national societies, though with a greatly reduced membership ; the national organisations of Painters, Plasterers and Slaters wholly disappeared, and these trades fell back upon purely local trade clubs of the old sort. The Guildhall was sold, unfinished, to a private buyer, who finished it and turned it into a warehouse. The National Guild, of course, went down with the Union, and apparently left not even a trace behind.

The story of the great Builders' Union has here been told as if it had been an isolated struggle. But, in fact, the whole of its later history and collapse is bound up with the story of the greater body of which Owen and his followers designed that it should form only a single section. It is impossible really to disentangle the history of the O.B.U. from that of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, to the collapse of which its collapse was beyond doubt chiefly due. Its significance, therefore, can only be understood in relation to the wider movement of which it formed a part. To the record of this movement we must now turn our attention.

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IV

The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union

Owen came back from the Builders' "Parliament" of 1833, which he had persuaded to a complete acceptance of his plans and to the launching of the Builders' Guild, in a condition of fervent enthusiam and hope. He was sure that within a few months the reign of Capitalism would be ended, and the Co-operative system securely established by the common determination of the "industrious classes." And he was sure that the time had come for all trades to follow the example of the Builders, and decide to take the control of production into their own hands. For this purpose a new instrument must be created. The working-class dream of a single inclusive Union of all workers must be realised in fact, and the great Union must absorb all sectional bodies, such as the Builders, and take to itself the supreme direction of national affairs.

Owen came back in order to attend a National Conference of Trade Unions, "Union Shops," and Co-operative Societies, which had been summoned to meet in London at the beginning of October. To this gathering he unfolded his wider plan, and proposed the formation of a "Grand National Moral Union of the Productive Classes of Great Britain and Ireland." All Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, Benefit Societies, and "all other associations intended for the improvement of the working classes" were urged to form themselves into affiliated lodges of this great Union. The plan was enthusiastically endorsed, and a provisional council was appointed to carry on the work of organisation pending a further Conference, at which formal rules would be framed. Without any previous notice, or any direct mandate to the delegates from those who sent them, the One Big Union was brought into being. In February, 1834, a second Conference drew up a constitution, and adopted the title of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, by which this leviathan is usually known.

Thus the plan mooted in 1818, and again in 1826, and seriously attempted by Doherty in 1830, seemed at last in a fair way to realisation. But Owen's great Union had far more ambitious aims than any of its predecessors. Its immediate object was nothing less than the entire supersession of Capitalism and competition by a Co-operative system of workers' control. It aimed, not only at controlling industry, but at superseding Parliament and the local governing bodies, and at becoming the actual Government of the country. "There are two Parliaments in London at present sitting; and we have no hesitation in saying that the Trades Parliament is by far the most important, and will, in the course of a year or two, be the most influential." So wrote J. E. Smith in the Owenite *Crisis*, contrasting the democratic suffrage of the Unions with the still narrow franchise of even the reformed House of Commons.

The formation of the "Grand National" was followed by a feverish period of Trade Union activity. Countless existing Unions linked up with the new body; and countless new societies were formed. The Owenite associations became "Miscellaneous Lodges" of the Grand National; the "Union Shops," local Trade Unions, and Committees of United Trades passed over *en bloc* into the larger organisation. Before long half a million members were enrolled; and it was estimated that all the Trade Unions together had a membership of more than a million. Everywhere there was eager starting of new "Union Shops" and Co-operative Societies. Women workers and agricultural labourers were organised in considerable numbers. Even the Benefit Societies, then engaged in concerted action in order to secure better legal protection, were swept into the current of Owenism, and a project was launched for the formation by them of an Agricultural and Manufacturing Association, whereby they could apply their accumulated funds to Co-operative production.

But already the storm was gathering. In November, 1833, the employers at Derby, where the Trades Union had a strong following, presented the "document" to their workers, and locked out all who belonged to the Union. The "Grand National" was thus faced with the problem of financing a great dispute before it had any rules or any central fund of its own. At almost the same time the hosiery workers in Leicester were locked out for joining the

Union, and similar troubles arose in Glasgow and several other towns. Simultaneously, the Builders' Union was engaged in its great struggles in Manchester and Birmingham.

The " Derby turn-out," however, was by far the largest and most spectacular of these disputes ; and it became the test struggle to which all eyes were turned. The Union lodges in all parts of the country collected money on behalf of the Derby " turn-outs," and this was applied partly as strike pay, but also largely in starting schemes of Co-operative production. As soon as the " Grand National " had adopted a constitution it decreed a shilling levy in support of the Derby dispute ; but after four months' struggle the Union could finance the stoppage no longer, and the workers were compelled to go back on the employers' terms.

Meanwhile, a second smashing blow had been delivered at the Union. A group of agricultural workers at Tolpuddle, in Dorset, led by two brothers named Loveless, formed a lodge of the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers, one of the constituents of the " Grand National." They were promptly arrested by the local magistrates, and, after a most summary trial, sentenced to seven years' transportation for the crime of administering unlawful oaths.

At this time it was the practice of most Trade Unions to adopt an elaborate ritual and ceremony of initiation, which included the administration of an oath of loyalty. This is easily explained. It was, in part, a common form, taken over from the Friendly Societies, out of which many of the Unions had grown, and derived from a common origin with the ceremonies of the Freemasons. It was especially elaborate in the building trades, and was probably adopted by the " Grand National " on the model of the Operative Builders' Union. It had further acquired a special solemnity during the period when the Combination Acts forced the Unions to organise secretly, and to exact from their members pledges not to divulge their proceedings. Owen, from the first, disapproved of these oaths and ceremonies as " relics of barbarism "; but he was compelled to acquiesce in their continuance.

These practices now afforded to the Whig Government a pretext for teaching the Trades Union an exemplary lesson. Its rapid growth and extensive aims had revived the panic of the governing classes and put them in a mood for drastic measures. Acts against

the administering of oaths by unlawful societies had been passed after the Nore mutiny in 1797, and again among the " Six Acts " of 1819. These laws were now invoked against the labourers who had joined the Union.

The monstrous sentence of seven years' transportation, defended by the Whig Home Secretary, Lord Melbourne, as a proper application of the law, at once roused furious protests. A London-Dorchester Committee, with Lovitt as secretary, was formed for the defence of the victims, and Owen headed a monster Trade Union procession to present a petition to Lord Melbourne. But the Whig Government hurried the sentenced men out of the country and refused to make any concession. Not until 1836, two years after the " Grand National " had disappeared, was the remainder of the sentence remitted, and it was two years more before the victims were actually released and brought back to England.

The Dorchester sentences, and the attitude of the Government towards the victims, showed plainly that no forces would be spared in crushing the Trades Union. The Builders' Union and the " Grand National " at once took steps to abolish the oath and the ceremonies which had made them subject to the law. But they had been heavily shaken, and fresh attacks were already preparing from all sides.

Indeed, the position of the great Union was very uncertain. The delegates who had originally founded it had acted without a mandate, and even after the organising conference of February, 1834, at which a definite constitution was adopted, it was by no means clear who was in it and who was not. The five great Unions which existed before its foundation—the Builders', Spinners', Potters' and Clothiers', and the Leeds, Huddersfield and Bradford District Union—apparently regarded themselves as independent bodies, and were not, after February, represented on the Consolidated Executive. The membership of the " Grand National " consisted mainly of local societies which had declared their allegiance ; but many of these had their own rules and funds, and there had been no time to devise, or put into effect, a common method of organisation. The Executive, dominated by Owen, appears to have been better at issuing manifestoes and drafting grandiose schemes than at introducing order into the administra-

tion. Recruits came in so fast, and dispute followed dispute so swiftly, that there was no time to deal even with the most pressing problems of management.

Troubles crowded thick and fast upon the Unions. The Spinners' Union had given notice of a general refusal, from March 1st, 1834, to work more than eight hours a day. But when the time arrived they did not feel strong enough to move, and action was deferred, first till June and then till September, and at that point definitely abandoned. In April there was a brief general strike at Oldham, arising out of the murder of a Union man by a blackleg in the course of a fracas ; but this, too, fizzled out after a few days. In the same month the London tailors struck for shorter hours. The " Grand National " imposed a general levy on their behalf ; but in June the funds were exhausted, and the men drifted back to work. Meanwhile, in May, the Leeds employers presented the " document," and the Clothiers' Union and the Leeds, Huddersfield and Bradford District Union were involved. Here, too, the dispute ended in the defeat of the men, and the breaking of the Unions' power. In July the London building dispute, already described, increased the strain under which the Unions were already breaking down.

Long before this the position had been worsened by internal dissensions. Next to Owen, the strongest men in the movement were James Morrison, of the Builders, editor of the *Pioneer*, and J. E. Smith, afterwards known as " Shepherd " Smith, the Univeralist preacher, who was editor of the Owenite *Crisis*. These two were both keen advocates of a strong and co-ordinated industrial policy, and before long they became very critical of the weakness of the " Grand National " Executive. Smith, moreover, held that Owen's anti-religious views were wrecking the movement and alienating support ; for Owen's " atheism " was being largely used by the newspapers to discredit the Union and its work. Owen, on the other hand, was also dissatisfied with the way the movement was going. He disapproved of sectional strikes, and was by temperament unfitted for leadership in a militant working-class campaign. He had sought to make a union of all the " well-disposed members of the industrial classes," and had looked to the beauty of his Co-operative scheme to convince many employers as well as workers. He had hoped by

the power of union to achieve a bloodless and painless revolution ; he had certainly never meant to become the leader of a mere strike agitation. At first he contented himself with reproving the spirit of ill-will towards misguided persons manifested within the Union ; but soon he launched a special attack on Smith, whose inflammatory articles were encouraging this spirit. He got the Executive of the Union to displace the *Pioneer* from its status as official organ of the movement, and started a new *Official Gazette* in its place. Next he muzzled Smith, who had been vigorously criticising the Executive for its inaction, by shutting down the *Crisis* altogether. The Executive had apparently no strong men upon it, and followed Owen's lead at all points.

As the year advanced Owen realised that the great movement had failed. But his buoyant spirit did not accept defeat. He merely shifted his ground. With no more mandate than there had been for the starting of the Union, he persuaded the Conference, held in London in August, 1834, to agree to its dissolution, or, rather, to a complete change in its character and purpose. In its place the Conference founded a new Owenite propagandist society—the British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity and Knowledge. In appealing to force and the strike, Owen announced, the industrious classes had gone the wrong way to work. They must convince and not coerce ; they must return to their old methods of education and propaganda, and make a purely moral appeal. Instead of the *Crisis*, Owen began the issue of another journal, the *New Moral World*. The change of name signified a profound change of method.

It is still uncertain whether the " Grand National " survived its dissolution by Owen in August, 1834. Apparently some sort of delegate conference was held as late as October ; but Owen's overtures to the meeting were met with a refusal to hold any communication with him. The rest is silence. The great Union died away after a life of a single year.

It must not, however, be supposed that all the parts perished with the breaking of the whole. As in the case of the Builders' Union, many of the constituent groups survived, and reconstituted themselves as separate societies, living on to become the nuclei of the modern Trade Union movement. The great body perished, and with it the great plan of establishing the new society by a

sudden mass movement. Trade Unions, sadly reduced in membership, took to themselves less ambitious objects. But, as we shall see, for long after the disaster a good deal of the Owenite influence survived, and plans for " Union Shops " and Co-operative production continued to figure in Trade Union policy.

Owen's direct contact with the Trade Unions ceased in 1834. Never again did he descend into the industrial conflict. Owenism, as we shall see, shaped a new course, returning, in part, to its projects of Co-operative Communities, and issuing finally in two movements which flourished greatly in the Victorian era—Secularism and Consumers' Co-operation. In the years after 1834, Owenism became chiefly a moral doctrine. The mass of the workers who had followed Owen turned back from Trade Unionism to political action, and devoted their energies to the Chartist Movement, which arose swiftly out of the ashes of the " Grand National."

Why did the great Trades Union Movement of 1830–34 meet with the overwhelming disaster that has been described ? The causes are not hard to discover. The Trade Unions were confronted by a class of employers full of courage and self-confidence, mostly " self-made men," who had fought their way to affluence, and were enthusiastic admirers of the system which had enabled them to rise. This class was strong and determined ; it saw infinite possibilities in the further exploitation of the new powers of production. It was also ruthless, and unmindful of human suffering. Its eyes were not on the man, but on the machine he tended. It had just won a great political victory, and established its claim to political power and social recognition. Those who kicked against it seemed to it blasphemers of the new power meriting the severest chastisement for the good of society.

This class, moreover, could depend on the full support of the Whig Government, which had granted its claim to political power. The Whigs had often been told that their action in passing the Reform Act would be the means of unloosing on Society every form of anarchy and disorder, and of destroying all respect for the rights of property. They were, therefore, even more intent than the Tories on showing themselves devout friends of order and property, prompt in the suppression of popular disturbances.

Against this invincible alliance of aristocrats and capitalists was pitted a working class, for the most part wretchedly paid and equipped, with little or no education, and hardly any experience of concerted action. This class was swept into Owen's great Union on a wave of momentary enthusiasm, and was taught by Owen to believe that the social millennium could be created in a few months by the mere fact of associative action. The workers responded and were carried away so easily just because they were not educated enough to understand the difficulties in the way. They had carried the Reform Bill by a mass movement; why should they not carry Socialism in the same way? They did not realise the difference that the great class of employers had been with them for Reform, but was now decisively against them.

It is easy enough to point out the weaknesses in the organisation of the "Grand National," or the vacillations and incompetence of its Executive. But these were not the causes of failure; they were, rather, the results of attempting an impossible task. The Union could not possibly have succeeded. No sooner was it founded than difficulties began to overwhelm it. Against it were forces with which it could not hope to contend. Before the workers could hope to make a great inclusive Union of all sections they had to accustom themselves to combination, and to learn the management of great forces—lessons even to-day by no means fully mastered. But, still more, before the workers could stand up to Capitalism, there had to be time for Capitalism itself to develop more fully its potentialities, and to make its contribution to history. Before the proletariat could hope to defeat Capitalism, Capitalism had to bring the proletariat to maturity. The working class in 1834 was still weak and immature—the more capable for that reason of sporadic revolt, the less capable of sustained constructive action, such as Owen demanded of it. The movement of 1834 was a glorious failure; but no qualities of leadership could have turned it into a success.

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CHAPTER VII. CHARTISM TO 1839

1. The New Poor Law
2. The Rise of Chartism
3. The Chartist Convention of 1839
4. The Newport Rising

I

The New Poor Law

The first important social measure of the Reformed Parliament was the Factory Act of 1833, which prohibited employment in textile factories (except silk mills) at less than nine years of age, fixed a maximum working day of nine hours for children under thirteen (from 1835), prohibited nightwork by young persons, and, most important of all, established the factory inspectorate. This Act, however, was really a carry-over from the days before Reform, and would probably have passed in much the same shape whether there had been Reform or not. The first great measure plainly reflecting the spirit of the Reformed Parliament was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

Reference has been made already to the condition of the Poor Law in the first part of the nineteenth century. In 1834 Poor Law expenditure in England and Wales averaged over 9*s*. per head of population, despite the drastic restrictions which had been made in many areas in the scales of relief. In eight counties the expenditure was over 15*s*. per head, Sussex heading the list with 18*s*. The heaviest expenditure was in the south of England, and especially in the Eastern and South Midland Counties. In the North it was comparatively light—6*s*. in Northumberland and Durham, 5*s*. in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and in Lancashire only 3*s*. 9*d*. In fact, pauperism was found chiefly in the agricultural districts, and was actually worst in the most fertile areas of the country.

This heavy poor relief was, in reality, a subsidy to wages. It enabled men barely to live where they would otherwise have starved ; but it also served to keep down the wages even of those who were not receiving relief. In face of the competition of pauper labour, hired out by the parish, it was impossible for wages to rise. The labourers, as a class, were ground down to the barest level of subsistence. Yet the farmers did not necessarily profit ;

for agricultural rents were adjusted to the prevailing wages, and the landlord skimmed off the surplus. Farmers and landowners combined, however, to grumble at the excessive poor rates, and to do all they could to cut them down by reducing the scales of relief. Still, the burden of pauperism grew, a seemingly insoluble problem.

There had been many projects and many committees and commissions for Poor Law Reform before the Reformed Parliament drastically remodelled the system. The Act of 1834 took the Poor Law out of the hands of the parishes and placed it under the control of a body of Commissioners, who rapidly reorganised the country into " Unions " of parishes, each with its Board of Guardians responsible to the central authority. The Commissioners, with Edwin Chadwick, thorough-going disciple of Bentham and the orthodox economists, as secretary, set vigorously to work. They swept away the entire system of poor relief in aid of wages, refused all forms of outdoor relief to able-bodied persons, and applied to such relief as was still to be given the principles of deterrence and " less eligibility," which still largely dominate Poor Law practice. They were extraordinarily ruthless. Having made up their minds that the old system must go, they refused to be influenced by any consideration of the sufferings likely to be caused by its sudden abolition ; for even if, as they maintained, wages rose in consequence of the change, there was bound to be an intervening period of intense suffering for those who had relied on the rates for relief.

In the House of Commons the Act was passed by overwhelming majorities, against the fierce opposition of a tiny group of Radicals led by William Cobbett. Cobbett was no defender of the old system ; but he maintained that all the poor had a right to good maintenance out of the product of the country, and that this right the Bill proposed to take away. It was, he contended, a measure confiscating the birthright of the poor. His last act, after the Bill had become law, was to advocate a national movement for organised resistance to its application. He died in 1835, just as the struggle was beginning. Cobbett was the last of the old Radicals who looked back to the days before the Industrial Revolution.

The Poor Law Act, and the persons appointed to carry it into effect, were not popular. The Commissioners were familiarly

known as the " Three Bashaws (or ' Kings ') of Somerset House " ; and they had uphill work during the early years. It may seem strange that the strongest resistance was encountered in the areas in which Poor Law expenditure had been comparatively low. But it is not really strange. The agricultural labourers in the Southern and Eastern Counties, on whom the change fell with the greatest severity, had no power to resist. There were riots in some places ; but these were speedily quelled by a show of force. The revolt of 1830 was the last widespread movement of the labourers till the days of Joseph Arch ; all power of resistance had been crushed out of them by starvation and by the migration of the more vigorous personalities to town or mine.

The greatest resistance came actually from the factory districts. Here Poor Law expenditure had been lower because there was no regular practice of subsidising factory wages out of the rates. But the Poor Law had been, for the workers in these cases, a last resort in times of unemployment, and such dying classes as the handloom weavers fiercely resented being driven into the workhouse—the new " Bastille," it was usually called—as a condition of relief. The segregation of the sexes in the workhouse was also deeply hated, and ascribed to the savage disciples of the " monster, Malthus's " theory of population. The workers in the industrial districts may not have hated the new Poor Law any more than the agricultural labourer ; but they were less under the heel of their masters, and they knew better how to organise a movement of protest.

The Poor Law question came to a head just as the great Trade Union agitation of 1830–34 was dying down. It called men's minds back from strikes and Co-operative Socialism to politics. The Reformed Parliament had brought forth this monster ; it was the reward given by the Whigs to their late allies in the struggle for Reform ; this was what came of handing over political power to the financiers and employers of labour. A savage hatred of the Whigs and the manufacturers ran through the agitation against the Poor Law, and coloured the Chartist movement in which that agitation was speedily merged. At times Chartism almost became Tory in its hatred of the Whigs ; and men like Oastler and Stephens, who were Tories in the political sense, played for a time a leading *rôle* in the agitation. Disraeli, the

young Tory, wrote his " Sybil ; or the Two Nations " as a Tory manifesto to the Chartists—a first essay in his favourite art of " dishing the Whigs."

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II

The Rise of Chartism

The Chartist Movement was essentially an economic movement with a purely political programme. The Charter, in which its immediate demands were embodied, was simply a plan of democratic parliamentary reform, relating the claims put forward by the Radical left wing from the very beginning of the Reform struggle. The groups which had fought in alliance before 1832 fell apart when the Reform Act became law; for the main body of the middle class, having secured its own admission to political power, felt no desire to go further. Lord John Russell, who had introduced the Whig Reform Bill, earned the name of "Finality Jack" by declaring that the Act of 1832 had settled the question once and for all.

We have seen how the working classes, angry with their late allies and disillusioned by their failure to win political power, turned away from political agitation and threw themselves feverishly into the growing Trade Union and Co-operative Movement. The defeat of the Trade Unions in 1834, and the enactment of the new Poor Law in the same year, directed their attention back to politics, and caused the rapid growth of the Chartist Movement.

The men who at first assumed the leadership in this new phase of the working-class struggle were largely the same as had led the working-class Radicals in the earlier agitation for Parliamentary Reform. In London, the leaders of the National Union of the Working Classes reappeared as the founders of the new movement. William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, Bronterre O'Brien, James Watson, John Cleave, William Carpenter, and many others, were men already tried in earlier phases of the movement. We have seen Lovett as an early Co-operator and secretary of the London Dorchester Committee. Hetherington was both an ardent Owenite and an active member of the N.U.W.C. and the pro-

tagonist in the fight against the Stamp Taxes. As owner of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, one of the best working-class journals, which Bronterre O'Brien edited for him, he suffered many terms of imprisonment for the sale of unstamped newspapers in violation of the law. Watson and Cleave had also been active in issuing unstamped journals and in the propaganda of the N.U.W.C. Carpenter's *Political Magazine*, and other writings, had made him well known as a Radical journalist. All these, and many more old stalwarts, felt, after the collapse of the great Trade Unions, that the time had come for a new move.

These men knew well that the grievances from which the workers suffered were chiefly economic, and that no purely political reform would cure them. But they looked on the further reform of Parliament as a necessary means to economic changes, holding that the capital-owning classes could not be mastered economically while they kept their hold on the machinery of government. Moreover, amid the dissensions which followed the defeat of 1834, the younger working-class leaders were seeking a cry at once simple and direct enough to unite all sections among the workers in its support. A plain demand for complete parliamentary democracy, based on Universal Suffrage, seemed to meet this need ; for all the working-class groups could unite to secure this as a means to whatever divergent ends they might have in remoter view.

The fact, however, that Chartism was fundamentally an economic movement, and that parliamentary reform was sought only as a means, must never be lost sight of. It both colours the whole activity of the movement and explains the rapidity of its growth and the multitude of its followers. It helps also to account for the dissensions which soon began to arise within the Chartist body.

The story of the origin of the Charter has been often told. After the Reform Act most of the Political Unions had been wound up, or had lapsed into inertia. The National Union of the Working Classes had remained active till 1834, and then had broken up under the stress of that eventful year. There was, after 1834, no effective head or centre for the working-class Radical Movement. Owenism collapsed in 1834 ; and Cobbett and Hunt, leaders of the old quarrel, both died in the first half of 1835. There was

acute unrest, aggravated by the Poor Law; but it lacked unity and direction.

Under these conditions a small group of London workers decided to form the London Working Men's Association, as a purely working-class body for quiet propaganda and educational work. A few middle-class men, including Owen, were made honorary members; and Francis Place, now an old man, acted as mentor to the new body. But the control was entirely working-class. Lovett, as usual, became secretary, and with him were Cleave, Hetherington, Henry Vincent, who became the orator of the movement, Watson, George Julian Harney, and others.

The L.W.M.A. began very quietly, organising small branches in London, and making a few pamphlet appeals to the workers in other towns to follow its example. It had so far no relations with the great popular agitation against the Poor Law which was sweeping through the north of England. Early in 1837 this agitation assumed a far more vigorous shape. The Poor Law Commissioners, for the first time, made a serious attempt to introduce the new system into the Northern Counties. A period of bad trade and high prices set in, and the drastic restrictions on poor relief were for the first time seriously felt by the main body of the industrial workers. The L.W.M.A. became conscious of a rising movement of unrest over the whole country, and of this movement it sought to take the lead. It began to send out, in the Owenite manner, "missionaries" to preach its gospel, and everywhere these touring lecturers met with outstanding success. Working-class societies and newspapers sprang up fast in all the principal areas. The L.W.M.A. soon found itself only one section in a great movement including many diverse elements and tendencies.

First there was, in the North and in the Midland textile districts, a great mass movement of unrest, directed principally against the Poor Law, but, in reality, a hunger revolt, fed on unemployment and despair. Joseph Rayner Stephens, an excluded Methodist parson with an independent chapel of his own, and Richard Oastler, land agent and Tory democrat, were the first leaders of this welter of protest. Both were fiery orators, with great power of rousing the people, but no constructive programme save a juster system of poor relief. But in 1836 there appeared a new and far more powerful leader—Feargus O'Connor, who had

formerly been an Irish M.P. and follower of Daniel O'Connell, but had quarrelled with his leader and been excluded from Parliament in 1835. O'Connor had worked with Cobbett in Parliament, and had defended there the cause of the Dorchester labourers. In 1836, after a time in London, he moved to the North, and started a fiery Radical crusade. In the following year he founded at Leeds the *Northern Star*, which became by far the most influential of the Chartist journals.

O'Connor, like Stephens, was a demagogue—a powerful orator, with an immense power of stirring great multitudes of men. More than any other man he was responsible for turning the northern agitation from a campaign against the new Poor Law into a movement for Radical Reform. He became speedily the outstanding figure in the movement.

A second impetus to Chartism came from Birmingham, where the Political Union, one of the strongest centres of the Reform Movement before 1832, had been dissolved in 1834. In 1837 it was revived, and a new and vigorous movement at once sprang up. This movement, however, was by no means exclusively working-class, and remained chiefly under middle-class leadership. Its outstanding figure was Thomas Attwood, banker and Radical M.P., but, above all, currency reformer, with a plan for ensuring universal prosperity by the liberal issue of paper money as credit against production—a plan since revived at many times and in many shapes. Attwood was a sincere Radical, who had usually voted with Cobbett in Parliament. He was exceedingly popular ; and he successfully impressed his policy of currency reform and parliamentary democracy on the new Birmingham Political Union. This body included a strong working-class section, led by John Collins ; but Attwood and his friends were, at first, the real leaders.

Thirdly, there was the movement represented chiefly by the London Working Men's Association, and the similar societies founded elsewhere under its influence. This movement was almost purely working-class, with a small lower middle-class element of shopkeepers, publicans, and the like ; but it was also essentially moderate in tone and temper. Its strength lay, not among the starving factory workers, but among the comparatively well-paid skilled artisans of the older towns, who could better

afford to wait and organise a constitutional agitation, and were not under the same temptation to break out into riot, or under the same need for immediate help in distress.

These three groups together made up the chief strength of Chartism. Of course, this is a simplification of the facts. There were middle-class Chartists in many other towns besides Birmingham, moderates in the North, and extremists in London. Scotland, on the whole, was a moderate centre. Manchester was divided, but with a left wing tendency. In London, George Julian Harney, one of the best of the Chartist leaders, was the centre of a left wing group which, in 1837, split off from the L.W.M.A. and formed the London Democratic Association in close touch with O'Connor. Bronterre O'Brien, an old associate of Hetherington and his group, joined the left wing, and became the chief writer for O'Connor's *Northern Star*. But, despite these cross-currents, it is, in general, true that Chartism was based on three main groups—the O'Connorites, who drew their strength from the factory operatives and formed the left; the Lovettites, chiefly skilled artisans in the older towns, who formed a more moderate " centre " ; and the Attwoodites, based on the Birmingham Political Union, who sought to keep alive the old alliance of working-class and middle-class Radicals, and complicated the issues with their plan of currency reform.

For a brief space, a fourth group, which would have had most in common with the third, seemed likely to play a part. There was in Parliament a small group of Radicals who differed from the main body of the Whigs, and courted alliance with the workers. Attwood was of this group; but its leading figure was J. A. Roebuck, a friend and collaborator of Francis Place. In 1837 Place succeeded in bringing together this group and the leaders of the L.W.M.A., with the object of drafting an agreed Reform Bill for introduction into Parliament. Out of this move grew the People's Charter. But, having helped to make the draft, the Radical M.P.'s dropped out of the movement, and were seen no more. They were lukewarm from the first.

Lovett drafted the Charter, Place and Roebuck went through it, a joint committee of the L.W.M.A. and the Radical M.P.'s passed it, and it was published in May, 1838. Almost at the same time the Birmingham Political Union issued its National Petition

for reform, in which almost precisely the same demands were put forward.

There is nothing strange in this ; for there was nothing new in the People's Charter. Both Charter and Petition were simply re-statements of the familiar case for full parliamentary democracy, based on Manhood Suffrage. Women Suffrage was discussed, and the L.W.M.A. leaders were in favour of it. But it was not included in the programme because they felt it would be used to laugh the Charter out of court. The programme thus remained, in all essentials, what it had been from the early days of the Reform Movement in the eighteenth century—what Cartwright and Cobbett had preached, only put down with rather more exactness and elaboration than in previous phases of the movement.

The " six points " of the Charter are well known. They were (1) Manhood Suffrage ; (2) Vote by ballot ; (3) Annual Parliaments annually elected ; (4) The abolition of the property qualification for M.P.'s ; (5) Payment of Members ; and (6) Equal Electoral Districts, rearranged after each decennial census. All these points, except the last, were also included in the Birmingham Petition. They were the common stock of all Radical Reformers. Differences within the Chartist Movement arose, not over the formulation of a programme, but over the measures to be adopted in order to secure its acceptance. On this point there was room for the widest divergences of opinion and strategy.

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III

The Chartist Convention of 1839

Early in the growth of Chartism there began to be talk of a "Convention," an assembly of delegates from the Chartist membership throughout the country to work out a method of securing the acceptance of the Charter. The word "Convention," as we have seen, had associations which commended it to those who were in revolt. It recalled the French Revolution, and it also roused memories drawn from the revolutionary history of the seventeenth century. It suggested, not merely a conference, but an assembly claiming the right to legislate for the people. It was, and was meant to be, a challenge to the Parliament at Westminster from a People's Parliament, based on a wider suffrage and possessing a more real popular mandate.

"Conventions" had, indeed, accompanied every phase of Radical history since 1789. The Corresponding Societies had called their "Conventions" in the years following the French Revolution; and the Hampden Clubs had held a Convention in 1817. The Owenites, in 1834, had spoken rather of a "Parliament of the Industrious Classes" [1] than of a Convention; but the idea behind their assembly was the same. It is not suggested that any of these Conventions definitely set out to make a revolution and establish itself as the government of the country; but in each the element of challenge, and the claim to a greater right to govern than those actually in power could claim, was present in greater or less degree. The issue was seldom plainly stated; but it was constantly at the back of men's minds.

Thus, when the Chartists began to talk about holding a Convention, it was open to understand them in two ways. They might mean merely to hold a Conference, and so express with greater strength and unity their demand that Parliament should pass the People's Charter into law. Or they might mean to

[1] See page 124.

summon an assembly which would proclaim itself as the government and take the lead in a forcible revolutionary movement. In 1917, the Soviet Conference in Russia, until the Bolsheviks definitely secured a majority, was in much the same ambiguous position. Of the Chartists, some urged the Convention merely as a way of demonstrating the strength of their following, and some because they hoped to use it as an instrument of social revolution ; but most simply urged it, and left the question of ulterior measures to decide itself in the future.

Whatever might happen later, it was necessary, in the initial stages, to keep as far as possible within the law. This governed the form of the Convention. " Corresponding Societies " were still illegal, and the Government had further drastic powers for the suppression of seditious meetings and conspiracies. It was, therefore, thought desirable to avoid the appearance, while achieving the reality, of national organisation. This was done by choosing the delegates to the Convention, not through the local Chartist societies, but at great public meetings held in the open air in each important centre. In practice, this made no difference, for the nominations were all arranged beforehand by the local societies. But it was regarded as an advantage, both because it appeared to keep the Convention within the letter of the law, and because it made the delegates the nominal representatives of the vast crowds which attended the meetings.

During 1838 vast meetings were held throughout the country, often at night by torchlight, and in connection with huge " torchlight processions " of Chartist sympathisers. It seemed that the whole country was roused to support the Charter. At Birmingham, where the leaders had wished to base the agitation on their own " Petition " rather than on the more revolutionary-sounding " People's Charter," a great meeting adopted the Charter as well as the Petition, and forced the hands of the moderates. From every centre delegates were chosen to attend the Convention ; the orators of the movement went everywhere, stirring up the people and addressing immense and enthusiastic audiences. At the same time, the agitation against the New Poor Law reached such a height that in many parts of the country its introduction had to be suspended, and outdoor relief paid as before under the old system.

These measures did not pass without provoking counter-

measures by the Government. News reached the Home Office from many districts that the workers were purchasing arms, and that unlawful drilling was in constant progress. The Government refused, indeed, to suppress the Chartist meetings ; but it began to organise its military forces to deal with any possible outbreak. Additional troops were sent to the most threatened districts, especially South Wales and the north of England, and in April, 1839, General Sir Charles Napier was given the command of the Northern District.

Meanwhile, on February 4th, 1839, the Chartist Convention had met at the British Hotel, Cockspur Street, Charing Cross. It represented nearly all the industrial areas of England, Wales and Scotland ; but there was not a single delegate from the agricultural areas. George Loveless, one of the Dorchester labourers of 1834, was elected for Dorset, but never took his seat. Nearly all the well-known leaders of the movement were there, and arrangements had been made to meet the expenses by means of a " National Rent," collected from loyal Chartists throughout the country. Many of the local bodies had further undertaken to maintain their delegates while the Convention was sitting. At the first meeting Lovett was appointed secretary.

The first business of the Chartist Convention was to present to Parliament, through Attwood and Fielden the National Petition, for which signatures were being actively collected by the local bodies. But this took time. The Petition, with 1,200,000 signatures, was not ready till May, and even then there were unavoidable delays before it could be debated in Parliament. The Convention had thus either to disperse or to go on talking for several months before a critical point in its career could be reached.

Protracted discussions which cannot issue in immediate action inevitably give the maximum of opportunity for disagreement. In a crisis involving action, even those who disagree in theory may be carried along together by the force of events. But, when there is nothing to do but talk, every talker has ample scope for finding points of dissent. In the present case, moreover, there was, as we have seen, a fundamental ambiguity about the whole purpose of the Convention. Those who held that it should be merely a form of peaceful and constitutional demonstration were soon appealing to the Convention explicitly to adopt their point of view, while

those who held that reform would be achieved only by a show of force were soon urging the consideration of " ulterior measures," to be put into effect unless the Charter was speedily adopted by the House of Commons. The majority, standing between these two extremes, successfully avoided committing the Convention, as a whole, to either ; but within a few days of the opening the extreme right wing, headed by the younger Cobbett, withdrew because they could not secure from their colleagues a definite disclaimer of unconstitutional intentions.

By May, 1839, the Chartist Petition, with 1,200,000 signatures, was at last ready to be presented. But at this point an untoward accident upset the Chartists' calculations. Lord Melbourne's Whig Government, in difficulties with the House of Commons, decided to resign. Before the Petition could be presented, it was necessary to await the solution of a Cabinet crisis. This meant a long delay, very dangerous to the Chartist cause. Uncertain as ever what course to take, the Convention first migrated from London to Birmingham, in order to be more in the midst of its own supporters, and then, a few days later, adjourned for six weeks in order to enable a Chartist campaign to be conducted by the leaders throughout the country.

Accordingly, from May 16th to July 1st, the Convention did not meet, but a series of questions, designed to form the basis of possible " ulterior measures " should the House of Commons reject the Petition, was submitted to public meetings in all the important centres. Chartist supporters were asked whether they would bind themselves to obey the requests of the Convention ; whether they would, if requested, organise a run on the banks, such as Francis Place had planned in 1832. Whether they would be ready to " abstain from their labour " during a " Sacred Month " or general strike for the Charter. Whether they would be prepared to refuse payment of rents, rates and taxes. Whether they would support Chartist candidates for Parliament. Whether they had " prepared themselves with the arms of freemen to defend the laws and constitutional privileges their ancestors bequeathed to them." And a number of other questions betraying the Convention's doubts and hesitations about its future course of action. On the whole, the framing of these questions shows that, since February, the Convention had moved to the " left."

But there was still room for more than one interpretation of its meaning.

The " Bedchamber " crisis at last ended, and the Whigs returned to power. The Petition was presented on June 14th ; but Attwood and Fielden, its sponsors, could not secure a day for debate upon it until July 12th. Meanwhile, on July 1st, the Convention reassembled in Birmingham, where excitement was already running high, and the magistrates promptly sent for police from London, having at this time no city force of their own. They had already forbidden meetings in the Bull Ring ; but these had been frequently held in their despite. The London police, on arrival in the city, found a meeting in full swing. They dispersed it with violence, and a large number of persons on both sides were injured. This led to further disturbances, and to a strong protest by the Convention at the invasion of the right of public meeting. Lovett, who signed the notice as secretary of the Convention, and Collins, the local Chartist leader, were arrested. Nevertheless, without taking any action for their release, the Convention moved, a few days later, back to London, in order to be there when the Petition came up for debate in Parliament.

In the debate, Attwood, Fielden and Joseph Hume supported the Petition ; Lord John Russell, for the Government, and Disraeli, in a characteristic speech, opposed it. Forty-six voted for it and 235 against. The Convention found itself, at long last, faced with the necessity for action. After two days' debate it decided, by thirteen votes to six, to call a " National Holiday," or general strike. The " Holiday " was to begin on August 12th, and the Trade Unions were to be asked to co-operate in calling it.

Thus the Convention, in a thinly attended meeting, at last determined to act. But still there were doubts. Was the " National Holiday " to be merely a cessation of work, compelling the attention of Parliament through the dislocation it would cause, or was it to be the signal for a general rising ? And, in either case, would the main body of the workers either strike or rise ? For an ordinary strike the time was obviously inopportune ; for trade was bad, and many were out of work. The Chartist bodies had no funds ; and the Trade Unions, which had still not recovered from the disaster of 1834, were both disinclined for great adventures and weak owing to the state of trade. These arguments

would not necessarily weigh against an insurrection. But were the Chartists ready for an insurrection, and had they the strength to carry it through in face of the armed forces in the country, and of the united power of the upper and middle classes ?

These doubts grew stronger after the motion for the " National Holiday " had been adopted. Reports of weakness and unpreparedness poured in from many centres. Bronterre O'Brien, who had been a leader of the left wing in the Convention, moved, on July 22nd, that the resolution should be rescinded. After an angry debate, his motion was carried, only six voting against it. Instead of declaring a strike, the Convention now appointed a Committee to explore the position further and adjourned again for a month. It met again at the end of August, but only to dissolve after a debate full of violent recriminations.

Indeed, the very moment the Convention attempted to act, the real weakness of its position became evident. There was a great body of middle as well as working-class opinion in favour of the main points of the Charter and of constitutional agitation for political reform. There was a large mass of distress in the factory districts, prepared for all sorts of protests and demonstrations, and without regard for constitutional niceties. But this mass was not organised, and the organised body of Chartists did not succeed in forming an effective nucleus round which it could gather. How could it, when the most prominent leaders were sharply divided between " physical force men " and " moral force men," and when the leader with the greatest popular following, O'Connor, hovered uneasily between the two points of view, without committing himself to either ? The " physical force men " scorned the methods of the " moral force " advocates, but could do little without them, or, at least, without bringing over the wavering centre. The " moral force men " were not prepared, in any event, to follow the " left " into an armed rebellion which they either disapproved or regarded as hopeless.

Consequently the Convention, as a whole, could not make up its mind what it was trying to do. As long as it could, it played a game of bluff, letting all sections say what they liked in the hope that, between persuasion and intimidation, the Government would be made to give way. This strategy was all very well in 1831, when the Reformers had powerful support inside Parliament and the

whole of the middle classes behind them. It was useless in 1839, when persuasion enlisted at best only lukewarm middle-class support, and the threat of violence at once drove the middle classes almost solidly into the Government camp. The governing classes after 1832 were incomparably stronger and better entrenched against popular appeals to force than before.

The weakness of the Chartist position had been more than once clearly shown before the Convention came to an end. After the Whitsun campaign of 1839, the Government had begun a policy of arrests on a large scale. Benbow, the chief advocate of the " National Holiday," Lovett, Collins, Vincent, Stephens, and many other leaders, were in gaol before the " Sacred Month " was proclaimed. The Convention could do nothing for them. Then the calling off of the " Sacred Month " was a second confession of failure. Long before the Convention decided to adjourn, the moderates had left it in fear of its violence, and the extremists had despaired of it for its moderation. The real centre of interest had shifted back to the local Chartist societies which, faced with the failure of the Convention and the Petition, were considering what further action to take.

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IV

The Newport Rising

It is exceedingly difficult to disentangle truth from falsehood in the conflicting accounts which survive of events following the break-up of the first Chartist Convention. Did, or did not, a section of the Chartists plan a general insurrection throughout the country? If so, what leaders, and what districts, were concerned in the movement, and what form was it intended to take? Or was there really no such plan save in the fevered imaginations of the Government and the Press? Or was there a movement, worked up mainly by Government spies and informers, into which a few unwary Chartists were drawn as victims?

These questions admit of no dogmatic answer. It is clear that the prospects of an insurrectionary movement were freely discussed in Chartist circles, and that a good many Chartists went so far as to provide themselves with weapons of a sort. But it is not at all clear how far the Chartist groups passed from talking to actual planning, or whether there was any organised national leadership behind the sporadic efforts of small local groups. It is clear that Government spies played a considerable part in urging violent talk and preparation, which they afterwards betrayed to the authorities. But it is not clear whether they were mainly responsible for the movement, or merely worked upon something which existed apart from their efforts.

On the whole, it seems probable that the extreme "physical force" men, despairing of any action by the Convention as a whole, did, in its later stages, get together as a secret group, and at least begin some preliminary planning for a general movement of insurrection. John Frost, for South Wales, Peter Bussey, for Yorkshire, Dr. John Taylor, for the North, and the Pole, Beniowski, seem to have been the chief planners of this enterprise. After preliminary discussion, the leaders seem to have departed to their own districts, in order to test the state of local feeling, and, if

possible, carry the preparations a stage further by local organisation. It appears that the more moderate Chartists were kept wholly in the dark about these plans, and that even Feargus O'Connor was in no way privy to the movement.

Wales and Yorkshire, it seems clear, were the two centres chiefly concerned in the plan. But, while in both centres the leaders made local preparations, neither seems to have known at all definitely what the other was doing. Birmingham, where the left wing had now gained the upper hand, was also probably concerned, and meant to serve as a connecting link between Wales and the North.

At this stage, however, the movement was still far from having assumed the shape of an organised national plan of revolution. It is, for example, very doubtful whether any common date for an uprising was ever fixed, or whether there was any concerted plan at all. The story that the rising was to begin in Wales, and that the signal for its extension was to be the non-arrival in Birmingham of the coach carrying the Welsh mails, may conceivably have a substratum of truth ; but it is discredited by the fact that no coach at that time ran direct from Newport, the centre of the Welsh rising, to Birmingham. This point was brought out in the course of Frost's trial.

On the whole, then, the evidence is against any decisive planning of a national Chartist insurrection, but in favour of the view that such a movement had been talked about and sketched out in a preliminary way, and that there had been special communications about it between Yorkshire and South Wales, the two main " physical force " centres. This planning can, however, have been only preliminary ; for when the Welsh at length made a decisive move, the Yorkshiremen seem to have had no definite knowledge of their intentions or course of action.

This may have been partly due to the fact that O'Connor, apparently apprised of the plan almost at the last moment, instead of assuming the offered leadership, did what he could to stop it. His action may well account for the failure of the rising in Yorkshire, his own centre, to mature, even when the Welsh rising took place. It is credibly stated that O'Connor also tried, through a special emissary, to stop the Welsh movement, but was brushed aside as too late.

In any case, the sole armed movement of any importance made by the Chartists after the break-up of the Convention was the Newport rising of November, 1839. This affair, small enough in itself, and quickly over, is the nucleus round which legend and controversy have freely gathered. The bare facts are these.

On November 4th, 1839, some thousands of colliers, having assembled by night in the hills of Monmouthshire, marched on Newport, with the object of surprising the town. Their object seems to have been first to capture Newport, and then to march on Monmouth, where Henry Vincent, the Chartist leader in the West, was lying in prison. It had been arranged that three detachments from different areas should make the descent together. But night attacks are difficult to arrange ; and, in effect, the advance was delayed long enough to give full warning, and only one of the three parties arrived on the scene in time to take part in the critical movement. A tiny body of soldiers, posted in the Westgate Hotel, on which the attack was first directed, sufficed to rout the attacking party, which had apparently expected no resistance, and believed the troops to be on its side. A number of the colliers were killed or wounded ; and within a few minutes the main body was flying back to the hills. So began, and so ended, the Newport rising. The other two bodies of insurgents dispersed on hearing of the fate of the first body. It remained only to arrest the leaders, and to make examples of them for the discouragement of others.

The leader of the Newport rising was John Frost, a linen-draper of Newport, formerly Mayor of the town, and a magistrate until his commission was revoked on account of his Chartist activities. Frost had been one of the chief spokesmen of the left wing in the Chartist Convention. Earlier he had been a leading Reformer, and had taken an active part in the coal miners' movement of the years before the rise of Chartism. In 1839 he was in close touch with Harney, Bussey, Dr. John Taylor, and the rest of the " physical force " section ; and, if a national rising was planned, he was its outstanding leader. With Zephaniah Williams, William Jones, and the other leaders of the Newport Movement, he was arrested immediately upon its collapse, and put to trial for high treason before a Special Commission, headed by the Lord Chief Justice.

The result of the trial was a foregone conclusion, though Chartists throughout the country raised a substantial fund for the

defence, to which O'Connor contributed a week's profits of the *Northern Star*. Dr. John Taylor, and a few other leaders of the "physical force" section, tried hard to force a second rising for the rescue of the prisoners, but without success. A secret Convention was held in Manchester, and there were tiny armed movements in a few places in the North. But no rescue was attempted. Frost, Williams and Jones were sentenced to death, and the sentence was commuted to transportation for life.

The Newport rising was the signal for a fresh and still more extensive campaign of arrests. On one charge or another, nearly all the remaining Chartist leaders were soon lodged in gaol. Feargus O'Connor, who had been absent in Ireland during the Newport trouble, was gaoled for libel. Some said that his absence had been intentional, but there is no evidence of this, or that he knew until the last moment of the preparations for the rising. When he did know he certainly did all he could to prevent the outbreak, and he may have left for Ireland in the belief that his efforts had been successful. O'Connor, from first to last, hovered uneasily between extreme left and centre. His speeches often seemed to rank him definitely with the advocates of "physical force." But, in fact, he probably realised that "physical force" was hopeless, and was playing, at least half-consciously, a game of bluff.

Prosecution and imprisonment, however, fell on all sections alike. By the middle of 1840 the Chartist Movement was almost wholly leaderless, broken, and disorganised. It seemed to have collapsed as completely as Owen's great agitation of a few years before. The Scottish Chartists, who had seceded in September, 1839, and set up their own movement on moderate and constitutional lines, held together; but elsewhere the organisation seemed to be wholly in ruins. Chartism, indeed, never regained the apparent strength it possessed in 1839. But the end was not yet. Before the year 1840 was out there were signs of its revival.

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CHAPTER VIII

CHARTISM—LATER PHASES

1. The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League
2. Chartism, 1840–1842
3. The Land Scheme—The Year of Revolutions
4. The Dissolution of Chartism

I

The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League

On the very day on which the Chartist Convention of 1839 opened in London, the Anti-Corn Law League held, also in London, its first national conference. The movement for the repeal of the Corn Laws was not new, and the system of "moderate duties" had already been introduced by Huskisson in 1823. Cobbett, followed by many of the Radicals, had vigorously opposed the Corn Law of 1815, and intelligent Radical opinion had been for a generation predominantly in favour of the free import of corn. But there had not been agreement on the point, and generally the demand for the repeal of the Corn Laws had occupied only a very minor place in working-class programmes.

The great Anti-Corn Law Movement, which began, and ran its course, simultaneously with Chartism, was not a working-class Movement. Its sponsors, and financiers, were the industrial employers of the North and Midlands, and their active following came mainly from the middle classes. But, as the agitation gathered force, it appealed more and more to the workers. There was plenty of money behind it, and it had the aid of excellent leaders and organisers such as Cobden and John Bright.

Inevitably, this great agitation, running simultaneously with the agitation for the Charter, came into sharp and constant conflict with the latter. The Charter itself contained, for the most part, demands which middle-class Liberals were willing to support, or, at least, which they would not oppose. But the driving force behind the Charter was far less the desire for parliamentary democracy than the urgent demand for the redress of economic grievances. Employers might not disagree with the Charter; but they disagreed profoundly with the Chartists. The Chartist Movement was a working-class movement, seeking higher wages and better conditions, the repeal of the obnoxious Poor Law Act, the passing of a better Factory Act, and many other economic

reforms, or even a social revolution. The Anti-Corn Law agitation was a movement of the employing and middle classes designed to lower prices, in order to reduce the cost of living and thereby to bring down the costs of production in industry.

Thus the fundamental antagonism between Chartists and "Leaguers," as the Corn Law repealers were generally called, was an affair, not of programmes, but of social and economic attitudes. Even Chartists who wanted the Corn Laws repealed hated the League, and suspected it of being a plot to distract allegiance from the Charter. Even Leaguers who favoured Universal Suffrage hated Chartism as a movement calculated to set class against class. The League was embryonic Liberalism, based on the collaboration of classes to get the best out of Capitalism; the Chartist Movement was embryonic Socialism, based on the class struggle, and hostile, above all, to the newly dominant middle-class industrialists.

This contrast ignores certain exceptions. There were Chartists who were prepared to collaborate with the middle-class reformers in order to get the points of the Charter adopted; and there were Leaguers who were prepared to make an alliance with the Chartists in order to carry both repeal and reform. But the main bodies of the two movements were in bitter opposition, and even those who were in theory prepared to work together found cordial co-operation impossible in practice. Especially did the plunge of the Chartists in 1839 into abortive revolt scare away middle-class sympathisers, whose ideas of reform were based on a peaceful development of Capitalism towards Democracy.

There were, moreover, divisions in the Chartist ranks, not only on the question of class collaboration, but also on the whole question of industrialism. Chartism inherited from earlier working-class movements a strong agrarian tendency, which found its strongest supporters in the half-starved operatives of the factory towns. These men, who had been followers of Cobbett and Hunt, were still largely peasants at heart, though enclosures and the new farming had driven them, or their parents, from the villages into the towns. Especially the handloom weavers and the framework knitters, who had been used to combine agriculture with industry under the domestic system, hated the new machines which had taken their livelihood away, and hated the lords of the new

machines. To them the proposal to repeal the Corn Laws appeared as a plan to complete the ruin of the countryside and the domination of machinofacture. Feargus O'Connor, an Irishman with an agrarian tradition behind him, owed much of his influence, as Cobbett had done, to his instinctive sympathy with men of this type. He and Bronterre O'Brien headed the anti-industrialist wing of Chartism, and were foremost in denouncing the Anti-Corn Law League as a plot to lower wages and force all the workers to slave in the factories. On the other hand, Lovett, Hetherington, and other leaders who belonged to the skilled urban crafts, were more disposed to accept industrialism as the necessary basis of Society. While O'Connor and O'Brien denounced industrialism, they followed Robert Owen in seeking to devise means for its social control.

Yet it was in vain that Place urged Lovett and his group towards a real policy of co-operation with the middle classes. Place wanted the Chartists to take up the repeal of the Corn Laws and add it to the working-class programme, receiving in return middle-class support for at least some measure of political reform. Lovett, after the fiasco of 1839, was prepared—on terms—for collaboration with the middle classes ; but he was no more willing than O'Connor to fling himself into what he regarded as an essentially middle-class agitation.

Thus the two great movements went forward side by side, often in bitter antagonism and never in alliance, the one to its resounding success and the other to failure and defeat. The Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 ; the Charter has never been conceded, though several of its points have been substantially achieved. The predominantly " middle-class " movement succeeded because the social and economic forces of the country were on its side. The working-class movement failed, not so much because it was ill-led and at sixes and sevens, as because the workers were not yet powerful enough to force their will on Society. And, at every stage, any leftward movement among the Chartists tended to drive their right wing supporters into the camp of the Anti-Corn Law League. The League was working with the times ; it had the immense advantage of proposing a single reform, perfectly practicable within the existing order. The Chartists, in fact if not in name, were asking for a new social order, based on a radical recon-

struction of Society. But the season for that was not till the rising middle class had time to develop and to exhaust the vast new resources which the Industrial Revolution had placed at their command.

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II

Chartism, 1840–1842

By the middle of 1840, despite the imprisonment of many of its leaders, Chartism showed clear signs of revival. A national conference founded a new body—the National Charter Association—and for the first time gave the movement a national organisation based on an individual subscribing membership, which rose to over 20,000 in 1842. New men took the place of the absent leaders ; but in the main the N.C.A. was, from the first, dominated by Feargus O'Connor, who used his journal, the *Northern Star*, by far the most influential working-class paper, to confirm his personal ascendancy. O'Connor was in prison till August, 1841 ; but from gaol he wrote articles and controlled the movement.

What he controlled was, however, only a fraction of the Chartist body of 1839. Lovett and his friends would have nothing to do with O'Connor or the N.C.A., and were, in return, roundly denounced as apostates. Lovett and John Collins had spent their time in gaol writing their little book, " Chartism," which attempted to put the whole movement on an educational basis. Lovett had indeed abandoned hope of getting the Charter by a *coup*, and now wanted the movement to settle down to a solid course of education, to found schools for the children instead of conducting fiery agitations, and to rely on self-improvement as the means to social regeneration. His book is a plan for a national system of education on a voluntary basis, entirely without State aid or control. On his release he organised the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People, in order to carry out his educational ideas. The Association founded one school, with Lovett at its head. But it gained no support outside the circle of Lovett's friends ; and those who did support it were ostracised by O'Connor and the N.C.A. Thus one of the three groups which together had founded Chartism practically passed out of the movement. " London is rotten," O'Connor declared.

Other Chartist moderates went off into other schemes of their own. Chartist Churches, a sort of Radical ethical societies, were founded in Birmingham, Paisley, Bristol, and a number of other towns. Christian Chartism became a rallying point for many of the more moderate groups. The Scottish Chartists kept their separate organisation, which was, on the whole, moderate in tone, though for some time the extremist, Julian Harney, was one of its paid lecturers. In short, Chartism was splitting up into a number of scarcely related movements.

The most ambitious rival to O'Connor and the N.C.A., which had their strength among the factory workers of the North and Midlands, came from the centre which had been the third original rallying point of Chartism in the years before 1839. At Birmingham, Attwood and his friends had dropped out, and the Birmingham Political Union had died in the conflicts of 1839. But from Birmingham, which had stood from the first for an alliance of the middle and working classes, a new group of men now began to preach the old policy in a new form. Joseph Sturge, Quaker, banker and corn-merchant, connected with the Anti-Corn Law League and an honest middle-class Radical, started the Complete Suffrage Movement in 1841 as a renewed attempt to unite the classes in a demand for parliamentary reform. Sturge wanted the Chartists to drop the Charter, and all the associations of violence connected with the name, and to join with Bright and the Leaguers in a programme of reform less drastic, but embodying some of its main points. He secured the backing of the Birmingham and Manchester Anti-Corn Law Leaguers, and appealed to all moderate Chartists to join him in a conference to be held at Birmingham.

Most of the discontented Chartist groups hostile to O'Connor accepted Sturge's invitation. Lovett and his friends, Collins, O'Neill and the " Christian Chartists," even Bronterre O'Brien, who had quarrelled with O'Connor, attended the Complete Suffrage Conference of April, 1842. The upshot was that all six points of the People's Charter were successively accepted by the Sturgeite conference. This was more than the promoters had bargained for ; but the last straw was the insistence of Lovett and his friends that the Charter itself should be endorsed by name as well as in substance. To this the Sturgeites, fearful of the violent associations of the name, would by no means agree. Finally, the

conference was adjourned, in order that the whole matter might be settled later at a more representative gathering. Meanwhile, a Petition embodying the six points was sent forward to Parliament, where sixty-seven members, including all the Free Trade leaders, voted for it, and 226 against. The results of collaboration seemed to be little more hopeful than those of isolated working-class action.

The resumed Conference of the Complete Suffrage Union met in December, 1842. This time the meeting was thoroughly packed by the Chartists, O'Connor and his group attending as well as the sections previously represented. The struggle over the Charter was at once renewed. Lovett moved, and O'Connor seconded, its endorsement. This was carried, and Sturge and his followers at once left the hall. The Complete Suffrage Movement, based on the alliance of class, came to a sudden and ignominious end. The Complete Suffrage Union, indeed, maintained a nominal existence till 1844, but from this point both Sturge and Lovett dropped wholly out of the agitation.

While the Complete Suffragists were organising their Petition, the National Charter Association was busy with a Petition of its own. The dimensions of O'Connor's organisation are shown by the fact that over three and a quarter million signatures are said to have been secured. Thomas Slingsby Duncombe, a rich Radical M.P. closely associated with the Trade Union Movement, presented it, and a new Chartist Convention assembled to give it backing. In the House, Macaulay made his famous and trenchant attack on Universal Suffrage, and the Petition was rejected by 287 votes to forty-nine. Once more the Chartists had asked Parliament to reform itself; and once more they had been rebuffed. Once more they were faced by the question of adopting "ulterior measures," or acquiescing, at least for the time, in the defeat of their hopes.

Nothing, save meetings of protest, happened until August, 1842. But in that month a strike movement, beginning in Lancashire, spread rapidly through the industrial districts of the North and Midlands. A temporary recovery of trade in 1841 had been followed by a new and severe depression, and employers were generally attempting to cut wages. The strikes began as opposition to the proposed reductions, but they rapidly assumed, under

Chartist influence, a political form. A Chartist Conference met at Manchester and attempted to take the lead. Chartist speakers went everywhere among the operatives ; meeting after meeting of strikers passed Chartist resolutions and declared that work would not be resumed until the Charter became law. Bodies of strikers went round Lancashire and parts of Yorkshire stopping the mills where work was still proceeding, and removing the plugs from the boilers in order to cut off the source of power. Hence the movement is sometimes called " The Plug Plot."

Strikes on a falling market, however, can hardly succeed unless they become revolutions. The Government speedily posted troops throughout the disturbed areas, and made hundreds of arrests. Very soon nearly all the leading Chartists were in gaol or in hiding, or had fled overseas ; and soon the starving workers were driven back to the factories on the employers' terms. The second phase of Chartism ended, like the first, in a defeat which threatened the dissolution of the movement.

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III

The Land Scheme—The Year of Revolutions

After 1842, what remained of Chartism passed completely under the domination of O'Connor. The forties were a great period of transition, both in politics and in working-class affairs. While the Chartists were trying to carry on their agitation along lines hallowed by Radical tradition, the attention of the workers was already being turned to new problems and forms of organisation. Victorianism was beginning; the foundations were being laid for the economic stabilisation which marked the middle years of the nineteenth century.

In 1846 the Free Traders gained their point, and Sir Robert Peel, at one blow, repealed the Corn Laws and broke the old Tory party asunder. In 1847 the long agitation for factory reform at last secured the passing of the Ten Hours Act and so made operative some of the changes urged by Robert Owen more than thirty years earlier. These were significant changes of national policy, marking a clear transition from the struggles of the Industrial Revolution to the smooth and secure working of the new capitalist order.

No less significant were the new departures in working-class organisation. Owenite Co-operation had nearly died out, despite many efforts to revive it. But in 1844 a little body of workmen, inspired by Owenite ideas, but seeking to realise them in a new way, founded the Co-operative store of the "Rochdale Pioneers," and set going the great modern Co-operative Movement based on the association of consumers for mutual trading. In 1845 the Trade Union revival, which had become marked as early as 1842, led to the formation of a new co-ordinating body—the National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour. But this body no longer planned a general strike or a sudden overthrow of Capitalism; it was rather a loose defensive alliance, the forerunner of the modern Trades Union Congress.

The old ideas, however, died hard. The revival of Trade Unionism led to a number of fresh experiments, on Owenite lines, in producers' Co-operation, including a Co-operative coal-mine near Oldham. The National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour created a companion body—the National Association of United Trades for the Employment of Labour—of which the direct purpose was to promote the formation of " Union Shops," like those of 1832. The pure Owenite Societies, shrunk up now into a sect more concerned with the promotion of " Rational Religion " than with economic or political change, made their last important adventure in community building in 1839, when they purchased Queenwood, or Harmony Hall, in Hampshire. The Queenwood Community lasted till 1845, and thus coincided in time with the greater part of the Chartist agitation.

These various movements, except the last, will be dealt with more fully in subsequent sections of this work, in connection with the later developments which came out of them. They are mentioned here because they undoubtedly affected the course of Chartism during the years following the defeat of 1842. The rejection of the second Chartist Petition, the defeat of the strikes of 1842, and the break-up of the movement into a number of fragments, had made it evidently hopeless to expect that Parliament could be speedily forced to accept the Charter, or to make any substantial concession. The Chartists had either to retire from the field altogether, or to reconcile themselves to a long period of propagandist activity without direct results, or to find some new course into which the movement could be deflected. As we have seen, Lovett and his friends turned definitely to educational work ; and many lesser Chartists passed over into the Free Trade movement. But neither of these was a way of holding the main body of Chartism together ; and O'Connor and his friends, influenced by the developments which they saw around them, shaped a different course.

On the one hand, from 1842 onwards, the *Northern Star*, watching the Trade Union revival and eager to secure the Unions as allies, gave more and more space to Trade Union affairs. On the other hand, from 1843 onwards, we begin to hear of plans for combating unemployment and building up a new democratic society

by planting Chartists on the land. In 1845 these schemes took definite shape in the creation of the Chartist Co-operative Land Society, re-named later the National Land Company. O'Connorville, or Herringsgate, near Rickmansworth, was founded in 1846, and soon several other estates were purchased and planted with Chartist settlers, pledged to spade-cultivation on their small holdings owned by the Society.

The Chartist Land Scheme, fathered and run by O'Connor from 1845 to 1848, obviously owed a great deal to Owen. But it was not Socialistic. In Queenwood the whole community cultivated the land in common and shared in the fruit of the common labour. At O'Connorville each settler had his individual holding, for which a rent was due to the Society. The product of his labour, apart from the rent, was his own. Owen had planned to cover the world with mainly self-supporting Socialist Communities ; O'Connor planned to cover it with peasant villages of small holders.

But if the two plans were thus vitally different, they had much in common, and they appealed fundamentally to the same land-hunger of the new urban populations created by the Industrial Revolution. This explains why thousands of workers rushed to support O'Connor's scheme, as they had rushed to support Owenism a few years before. They did feel that work on the land might be a way of escape from factory tyranny and unemployment.

Unfortunately, Owen's and O'Connor's schemes had also in common an excessive sketchiness and optimism in their financial arrangements. O'Connor, like Owen, produced marvellous rows of figures showing the certain financial success of his scheme ; but his figures were based on far too favourable estimates of productivity. Money rolled in, but before long the National Land Company was in serious financial trouble. In 1847 a great Press agitation against it was begun, and serious charges were made that O'Connor was stealing the funds. This led, in 1848, to a Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry, which showed that the finances were in a hopeless tangle. It was, however, proved that O'Connor, so far from having gained by his control of the scheme, had lost a good deal of his own money, in addition to the £90,000 collected, mostly in small sums, from the subscribers to the scheme. In

1851 the National Land Company was wound up ; but O'Connorville lasted on as a fairly flourishing little community for another twenty-five years, the settlers having been allowed to acquire their holdings individually when the main scheme collapsed.

From 1845 to 1847 the Land Company absorbed almost the entire attention of the Chartist remnant. But candidates were still nominated at bye-elections, and often elected on the show of hands, though they did not subsequently go to the poll. In 1846 O'Connor was thus nominated at Nottingham ; but in the General Election of 1847 he went to the poll and was elected with a good majority as the first Chartist M.P. He held the seat until 1852, when the madness which had for some years been growing upon him caused removal to a private asylum. He died insane in 1855. But before his affliction came upon him he took the lead in the last great Chartist rally of 1848—the year in which a wave of revolution swept over Europe, leaving scarce any country save Great Britain untouched by armed insurrection of some sort.

From the very beginning the Chartist Movement, though it was predominantly national and isolated, had held some intercourse with revolutionary movements in other countries, and some of its leaders had shown internationalist leanings. This tendency was greatly encouraged by the fact that, in the 'forties, London was the centre where large numbers of political refugees were settled, and from which many foreign Radical and Nationalist agitations were carried on. A German Communist League was formed by the exiles in London in 1840. Engels settled in London in 1844. Marx, later closely associated with Ernest Jones in his attempts to revive Chartism after 1848, was still abroad, mostly in Brussels ; but he came sometimes to England, and was in close touch, through Engels, with British developments. Mazzini and his group were in London, and had made England the centre of their revolutionary activity. Polish exiles abounded, and several, like Beniowski, threw themselves wholeheartedly into the Chartist agitation.

In 1847, the year when Marx and Engels drafted the Communist Manifesto and so began the modern phase of Socialism, there was an intensification of activity among the foreigners in London, based on an anticipation of the events then preparing on the Continent. Chartist leaders took a prominent part in demonstrations

on international affairs ; Marx came over from Brussels to address a big meeting in London. The excitement of the exiles could not but communicate itself to the British leaders. While the Land Scheme was slowly collapsing Chartism was experiencing a revival of more directly political interest.

Early in 1848 the Revolution in France gave the signal, and revolutionary movements developed in one European country after another. But in Great Britain there was not even a hint of revolution, and in Ireland Smith O'Brien's abortive revolt was quelled before it had time to begin. The time had gone by when the Chartists could even begin to plan an insurrection. Instead, they collected signatures for a Third National Petition in support of the Charter, summoned a new National Convention, and prepared to back up the Petition with a monster procession and demonstration which was to present it to Parliament. The rejection of the Petition was to be met by the election of a Chartist National Assembly, which was not to dissolve until the Charter became the law of the land.

The story of the great fiasco of the Kennington Common meeting is well known. The Government, hugely exaggerating the Chartists' strength and mistaking their intentions, placed the aged Duke of Wellington in command, and made every preparation for dealing with a formidable insurrectionary movement. Over 150,000 special constables were enrolled—Louis Napoleon, soon to be Emperor of the French, was one. Troops and artillery were concealed at strategic points all over central London. The Government offices were barricaded, and the Civil Servants armed. The Chartists had arranged to assemble on Kennington Common and march thence to Westminster. The Government proposed to stop this by holding the bridges with troops, and refusing to let the demonstrators come near Parliament. Shut away on the south side of the river they would be harmless, and their display would lose all its moral effect.

Estimates of the numbers who assembled on Kennington Common vary widely. *The Times* said 20,000 ; the *Northern Star*, 250,000. The former is probably nearer the truth. At all events the leaders, in face of the police prohibition, made no attempt to force the bridges ; and, after a number of speeches had been made, the Great National Petition was ignominiously delivered at

the House of Commons in a cab. It had 5,700,000 signatures, according to O'Connor's estimate ; the officials of the House made the number less than two millions.

The great meeting of April 10th, 1848, thus dispersed peaceably, without justifying either the hopes of continental revolutionaries or the exaggerated fears of the governing class. The first and second periods of Chartism had ended in defeat ; the third ended in a wholly inglorious fiasco. " Lord John Russell presents his humble duty to the Queen," wrote the Prime Minister of the day, " and has the honour to state that the Kennington Common meeting has been a complete failure." The revolutions and counter-revolutions which convulsed Europe in 1848 and the following years found no further echo in Great Britain.

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IV

The Dissolution of Chartism

After 1848 Chartism was finally dead as a national force appealing to the mass of the workers. O'Connor, verging on madness, lost his hold, and there was left no leader capable of swaying the multitude as he, with all his faults, had been able to sway them. Chartism had fallen from its high estate ; but it did not easily die out. For another ten years it lingered on, surviving to the eve of that revival of working-class political activity which we associate with the names of Karl Marx and the International Working Men's Association of 1864. Many links, indeed, serve to bind the two movements together. Many old Chartists played their part in the First International ; and Chartist activity from 1848 onwards partly anticipated many features of Marx's International.

These last years of Chartism are associated chiefly with the tireless and hopeless labours of Ernest Jones. Trained for a diplomatic career, and of upper class origin, Jones became, with the gradual waning of O'Connor's influence, the leader of the movement. By one association and newspaper after another he strove to revive the dying agitation. From 1848 to 1850 he was in prison ; but thereafter his activity was ceaseless. He kept the National Charter Association alive, and practically directed its policy between the Conferences, which were still held regularly until 1858. He tried in vain, especially in the abortive " Mass Movement " of 1854, to get the Trade Unions, by then growing rapidly in numbers and power, to put their weight behind the demand for the Charter. But by 1858 the movement was finally dead. Working-class political action was due to revive within a few years ; but the revival took a new form, based on the changed position and attitude of the workers themselves. Marx's First International formed a link between Chartism and the revival of purely British working-class action in the late 'sixties under the leadership of men like Applegarth and Alexander Macdonald.

Why did Chartism fail? And why, having failed in its main objective, did it thus die gradually away, leaving no organised movement for the next generation to inherit? The causes of its failure have been suggested already. It set out to accomplish a political change, for which the time was not ripe, as the means to an economic change still less possible of immediate realisation. It was a challenge of a working class still undeveloped, uneducated, unequipped with adequate organisation or leadership of its own, to a dominant economic power strongly entrenched, ably led, and, above all, full of the self-confidence of actual and prospective achievement. Before the great alliance of the old and new governing classes, cemented by the Reform Act of 1832, a purely working-class movement was bound to go down.

But Chartism was weakened, too, by the lack of any common constructive principles. The purely political programme of the Charter was a simple formula designed to enlist the support of all sorts and conditions of workers and left-wing Radicals, whatever their various ideas and policies might be. It secured unity of programme, but behind the programme there was no unity of idea or policy. Some Chartists were Owenite Socialists, some agrarian individualists, some currency reformers, some simply rebels against the new Poor Law and the factory system, some educationists, some revolutionary Nationalists, a very few in the latter days of the movement Socialists in the modern sense. Their followers were mainly the half-starved workers of the factory towns, to whom Chartism, like all other movements, was a bread and butter question. This mass might conceivably have been welded together into a solid body had the leaders agreed in policy as well as on a programme which merely masked fundamental differences of outlook. But, when leaders led all ways at once, what hope was there for the rank and file?

Writers about Chartism, observing the welter of conflict in policies and personalities, have been apt to colour their descriptions of the movement in accordance with their personal likes and dislikes. They almost all idolise Lovett, because he was obviously a man of high ideals and strict personal rectitude. They almost all abuse O'Connor, because he was obviously a mob-orator and a man of the most muddle-headed ideas. But the fact remains that Lovett, the ideal secretary, had no capacity at all for moving

men in the mass. He was far too intellectualist and moralist to make a leader—far too much a prig to affect men in the mass with his own enthusiasm for the cause. O'Connor, on the other hand, was, with all his faults, a born leader and inspirer of men. He led the Chartists to disaster; but without him it is very doubtful whether there would ever have been the great mass movement which he led. The trouble was that, having no common philosophy or ideal, or policy, men of these widely different temperaments and qualities were not under the compulsion of any force strong enough to make them work in co-operation. A common idea might have held them together; the Charter, a mere common programme, was not enough to prevent them from giving their mutual dislikes free rein.

Yet even if they had worked together Chartism could not have succeeded in its underlying economic aims. Both Capitalism and the working-class had to develop further before the struggle between them could be waged on equal terms. The history of the British Working-class Movement up to 1848 is the history of its adolescence, which is also the adolescence of the working class. In the later sections of this book we shall be studying the gradual development to maturer forms, corresponding to the stages in the development of Capitalism itself. But, before we pass on beyond this period of inchoate struggle and nascent ideas, we had best pause to make a brief estimate of the conditions under which the workers were living during the earlier half of the nineteenth century, and of the position which they had reached about 1850, when both Capitalism and working-class organisation were entering on a new phase.

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CHAPTER IX

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKERS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Condition of the Workers in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century

The period covered by this volume coincides roughly with what is called the "Industrial Revolution." The great change in industry had, indeed, not only begun but considerably developed before 1789, at which point our survey of the Working-class Movement really begins. But it had hardly begun, before that time, to evoke a characteristic response. There were both Trade Unions and popular movements, strikes and bread riots, before the opening of the revolutionary wars; but, as we have seen, it was under the three-fold impulsion of the changes in industry, the winds of doctrine that blew from France, and the peculiar economic and political conditions created by the long war with France, that a Radical working-class movement first grew up and assumed gradually a definite shape.

If 1789 is a convenient starting point, 1848 is a convenient date for a pause and a backward glance before this narrative is resumed. For by 1848 the first phase of the great change was definitely over, and a new phase was beginning. Until nearly the middle of the nineteenth century the Industrial Revolution was still in the making; thereafter it was not only an accomplished, but also a recognised, fact. Until about 1848 a large body of opinion was still questioning, or protesting against, the new Industrialism, and a good many reformers were still really trying to put back the hands of the clock. But, at least from the middle of the century, these protests nearly ceased, or ceased to command attention, and all classes alike settled down to make the best of the new conditions.

Thus, on the one hand, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 completed the step first plainly taken in the Reform Act of 1832—the acceptance of the new Industrialism by the old holders of political power. Sir Robert Peel's Act, though it split his party, really united the new and old governing classes, by making the acceptance of Industrialism a fundamental postulate of British politics. The landowner ceased to conduct the orchestra; but he

did very well for himself by playing second fiddle to the manufacturer. The country squires who cursed Peel in 1846 soon learned to acquiesce in the results of his policy—not least because the first twenty years of Free Trade turned out to be the golden age of British agriculture.

Similarly, as we have seen, the later 'forties were a turning-point in the history of the Working-class Movement. From 1789 to 1848 there were many successive waves of working-class revolt —the Corresponding Societies, the Luddites, the Cobbettite Reformers, the Owenite Trades Unionists, the Chartists ; and in every one of these movements, save the first (and here the parallel movement of the United Irishmen and the writings of Tom Paine express the familiar theme), the passion for free access to the land and the revolt against machinery played a vital part. From Paine's " Agrarian Justice " to O'Connor's Land Scheme, the workers found inspiration in ideas essentially hostile to Industrialism and based on the preservation or renewal of a peasant system.

This agrarian background of working-class unrest is, of course, easy to explain. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the main body of the workers consisted either of former peasants or of folk with a lively peasant memory and an instinctive peasant attitude. They hated the factory, not only because it was a hateful place in which they had to work terribly long hours under terribly evil conditions, and subject to a rigid and uncongenial discipline, but also because it was new-fangled, and had been the principal means of destroying the accustomed ways and means of life. In its most fundamental aspect, every working-class revolt up to, and including, Chartism was a peasant movement.

But after 1848, not only was the sorry relic of the peasantry in the countryside too reduced to rebel—it had shot its last bolt in 1831—the factory worker had largely forgotten, at least with his conscious mind, his peasant origin. He had got used to Industrialism ; he accepted it as his masters did ; he settled down to make the best of it. The decay of Chartism in the 'forties marks the critical stage in this transition. When the workers forsook Chartism for the new Trade Unionism and the new Co-operation, they turned their backs on the country and became, in feeling, townsmen in a land of towns.

The growth of the new urban Working-class Movement I shall be tracing in the next section of this study. Here my point is to mark the continuity up to 1848 of the various agitations which this volume has described, and to show their connection with the growth of the new Industrialism which determined their course. For about the middle of the century comes a turning-point, not merely in the Working-class Movement, but also in Capitalism itself. Till then, the new Industrialism was settling down, and affirming its empire ; thereafter, successfully and, for the time, unassailably established, it was sure of its foundations and could go on to fresh conquests in a somewhat different spirit.

Every writer on the period we call the " Industrial Revolution " has dwelt on the ruthless exploitation of the workers which marked its advance. The abuse of child labour, the long hours of employment, the insanitary state of factories and towns, the low wages and high profits, the rigid discipline, the repressive attitude, based on fear, of master to man, the callousness to industrial suffering at home even of great " humanitarians " like Wilberforce, the savage caricature of Smithian and Ricardian economics which found common acceptance in respectable circles—these have been described in many books and illustrated by evidence from countless Royal Commissions, Parliamentary Debates, and other contemporary sources. Writers may differ in their interpretation of these facts. The facts themselves are not disputed.

Why, it was asked almost at the beginning of this book, was the era of the Industrial Revolution marked by this intensity of exploitation ? And why, by the middle of the nineteenth century, do we pass, after a period of transition, into an epoch far less savage in its reading of " economic laws," and far less disposed to treat its employees as a species of dangerous wild beasts ? Broadly speaking, I find the answer, not so much in a growth of humanitarian feeling or of civilisation, as in a change in the position of Capitalism itself. Up to nearly the middle of the century, though wealth was accumulating fast and average rates of profit were high, industry suffered from a shortage of available capital. Banking was hardly put on secure foundations adapted to the new needs of industry for credit until after the Bank Charter Act of 1844. And, although the joint stock company as a form of organisation was extending its scope throughout the century, it was not securely

established, or made into a flexible instrument for the raising of capital for ordinary business, until the principle of limited liability was conceded to shareholders by the Acts of 1855 and 1862.

The ordinary employer was thus under the necessity of financing his business either by finding rich partners ready to join in his venture, or by borrowing on his own personal resources and security, or by accumulating out of profits the means wherewith to finance the expansion of his trade. Under these conditions, the "abstinence" of the capitalist, advanced by economists like Senior as the justification of his reward, was not wholly a myth. The man who became a big employer might, in course of time, buy a large estate, set up as a squire, and enter the ranks of the aristocracy with a handle to his name; but the smaller employer often pinched and saved in order to put every possible penny back into his business. And, if he pinched himself, he was not likely to have much compunction about pinching his workpeople a good deal harder, though the reward of their abstinence, as well as his own, went in the end to swell his wealth.

It may even be said that, until means were devised, in the modern joint stock company, for making the savings of "small" men available for the use of large-scale industry, the very rapid advance of Industrialism was only possible by the accumulation of all *surplus* income in the hands of a very limited class. Exploiting almost without competition in many trades the vast markets of a developing world, the capitalist could use in the expansion of his business every penny he could lay hands on. There were, indeed, big fluctuations of trade, due to the unregulated competition with which production was carried on; but the tendency of trade was to more and more rapid expansion, and it was all manufacturers could do to accumulate enough fresh capital to enable them to keep pace with the growth of demand. Thus, every rise in wages presented itself as a subtraction of so much sorely needed capital from productive use, and its diversion to mere unnecessary consumption by the wage-earning class.

In these circumstances, thrift came to be regarded as the paramount virtue, and the accumulation of wealth as a moral duty. The enforced abstinence of the workers was set side by side with the voluntary abstinence of the capitalist as the twin beacon-light of national prosperity. The humanitarian, prompt to denounce

the inhumanity of negro slavery abroad, convinced himself that low wages and factory slavery at home were the true means to the well-being of the nation and of the operatives themselves. The economists of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge composed panegyrics on the blessings brought by machinery with a sublime disregard for the plight of the unemployed hand-loom weaver or the unfortunate child labourer in the factory. Strikes and other movements of unrest seemed treason to the new beneficent power which was causing the trade returns and the national capital to increase by leaps and bounds.

This mood of jubilation was especially prevalent when the interruptions to trade during the Napoleonic wars and the great slump which followed the Peace of 1815 had been successfully left behind. Then Political Economy blossomed like the rose; then Societies and Institutions arose in all parts of the country to hymn the blessings of the machine age. And then, too, as we have seen, the workers developed their hostile criticisms of the new order of things, and learned from Hodgskin, Thompson, and Robert Owen a new gospel of their own.

By the middle of the century these conditions were rapidly passing away. The joint stock company, by mobilising the small investor in the service of large-scale industry, was providing a far simpler means for the accumulation of capital, and one which did not, to the same extent, call for the monopolisation of the whole "surplus" by a small class of employers. It became more readily possible for the *entrepreneur* to control large masses of capital which he did not own. The supply of industrial capital became more abundant, both because the national income had greatly increased and because more of it could be readily applied to industry by a wider class. There was no longer the same need for the capitalist to "abstain," or for wages to be kept down to the lowest point. Thrift and abstinence were still regarded as eminent virtues; but they did not to the same extent involve starvation wages. The workman could be urged to save and invest, where before he had only been urged to go without. This is not to say that wages rose at all in proportion to the increase in national wealth. They did not; but out of the rapidly-growing surplus enough went to the workers to cause an appreciable rise in the standard of living.

Thus, in the case of the cotton industry, real wages, very low

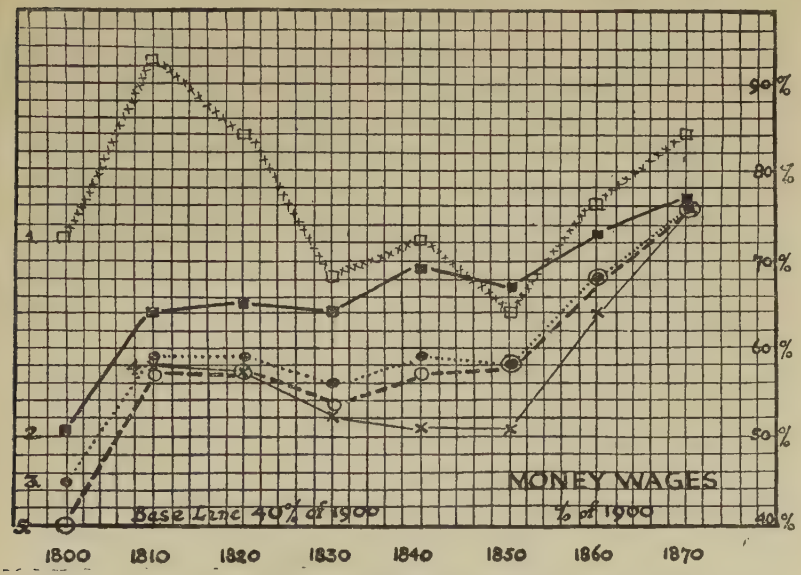
on account of high prices during the Napoleonic wars, rose appreciably with falling prices up to 1830, though money wages were appreciably reduced. But between 1830 and 1840 both money wages and real wages fell. Then came a big leap forward between 1840 and 1850, and after a period of equilibrium a further big advance between 1860 and 1870. An analysis of wages in certain other vital trades brings out the same conclusions, that the factory workers endured the worst sufferings during, and just after, the Napoleonic wars; that between 1820 and 1830 falling prices caused the standard of living to rise slowly; that after 1830 came another serious setback; but that after 1840 the worst period of the Industrial Revolution was over, and the workers, starting at a very low level, began gradually to win a share in the great prosperity of industry under the new conditions.

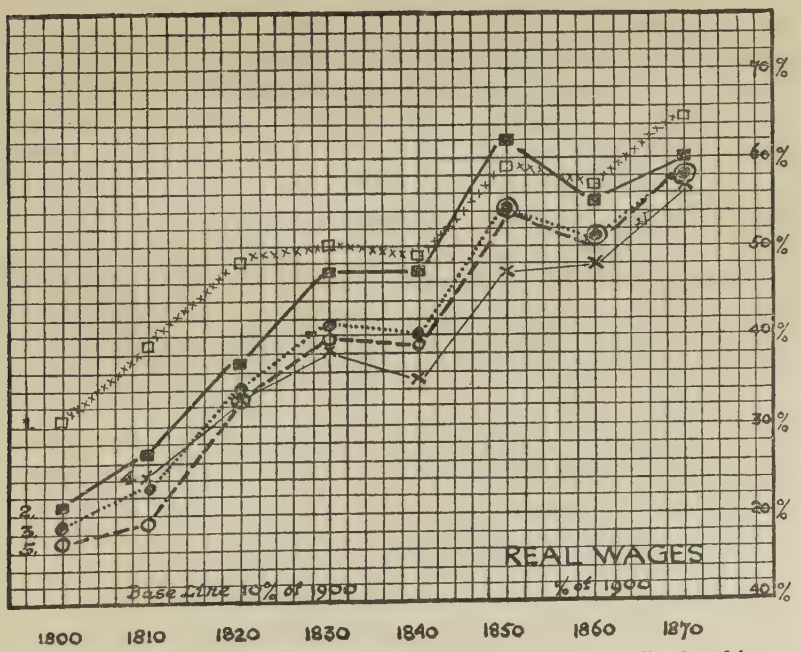
Despite the absence of reliable wage statistics on any comprehensive scale, the position described above can, in its essential points, be clearly shown in graphic form. The statistics used are taken mainly from Mr. G. H. Wood's "History of Wages in the Cotton Trade."

The conclusion to be drawn from these figures is clear. Shortly before the middle of the century there was everywhere a substantial advance in the standard of living. At first this was due not to rising wages but to falling prices; but later, when prices again rose, wages, after a lag, rose more than enough to meet them. The mid-Victorian era was essentially a time of advancing prosperity. And it produced a Working-class Movement at once far more stably organised than the movement described in this volume, and far more disposed to live at peace with the capitalist order of society. Revolts and mass movements gave place to the well-organised but moderate Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies of the new order. The workers both were ready to negotiate with their masters on the basis of things as they were, and found these masters more ready to negotiate with them, and to recognise the rights of collective bargaining, because they were no longer afraid that behind the workers' claims was a challenge to the capitalist Industrialism on which the new society was based. Conciliation and arbitration became, as we shall see, as typical of the new order as mass movements and revolts, born of despair, had been of the period dealt with in this volume.

Money Wages and Real Wages

Variations at Decennial Periods from 1800–1870 expressed as per cent. of Money Wages paid in 1900.





1 = Agriculture. 2 = Engineering. 3 = Cotton Factories (excluding hand-loom workers). 4 = Average of three industries (excluding Agriculture). 5 = Building.

It was from very intense suffering that the working class gradually emerged into these smoother waters. It would not, indeed, be true to suggest that all sorts of workers had their lot worsened as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Until the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars, the standard of living among the town craftsmen was slowly improving during the eighteenth century. War prices upset the purchasing power of wages; but thereafter the position of the craftsmen again improved. Builders, printers, workers in the food trades, tailors, skilled mechanics, and similar types of workers were not, for the most part, adversely affected by that growth of machine production which deprived the hand-loom weaver of his former prosperity. The wages of London artisans varied from 12*s*. to 15*s*. and more a week in 1760. In 1780, according to Francis Place, they were 18*s*., and in 1830 they had risen to 36*s*. This may be an exaggeration; but even if we take Professor Bowley's figure of 28*s*. to 30*s*. the rise is still substantial. On the other hand, the wages of the hand-loom weavers suffered a sensational decline. In 1800 the hand-loom weaver made about 19*s*. a week on the average, or about the same as the skilled artisan in a provincial town. In 1830 the artisan was getting about 23*s*., whereas the hand-loom weaver had fallen to about 6*s*. 3*d*. a week. In a less degree other craftsmen, whose skill was replaced by machinery, went through a parallel experience. From the highest point, reached about 1850, hand-loom weavers' wages fell altogether by from 60 to 80 per cent. Moreover, the once considerable auxiliary earnings of their wives and children by spinning in the home had been previously annihilated by the introduction of factory spinning after 1760. The prosperous hand-loom weavers were reduced to starvation by the growth of machines—a fact which readily explains why they were active in movements of revolt throughout the period we have been describing.

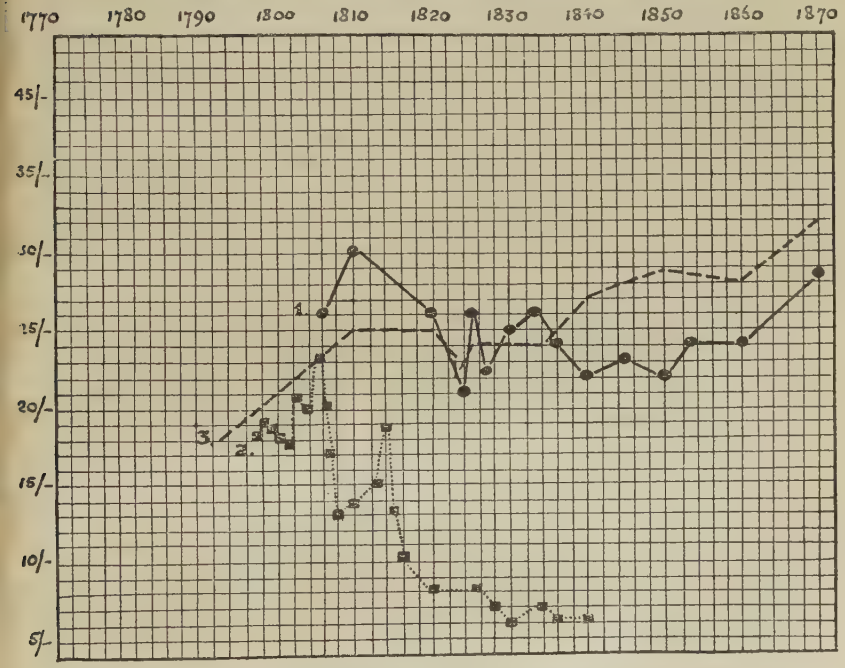
The contrast between the position of the hand-loom weavers and other types of workers is forcibly brought out by the accompanying chart. The hand-loom weaver, who in 1800 was earning the customary wage of a skilled artisan, fell before 1820 below the standard of the miserably paid agricultural labourer, and declined still further during the following twenty years, until his craft was totally extinguished by the competition of the machine. On the

other hand, the mule spinner in the factory, though his earnings varied greatly with the state of trade, and fell below the artisan level for the whole period between 1840 and 1865, retained his position as a skilled workman, and from 1865 made up more than the ground he had lost.

It is always a most difficult task to measure by any standard the

THE DECLINE OF THE HAND-LOOM WEAVERS

Weekly Wages compared with Wages of Spinners and Carpenters



1 = Manchester Spinners (Bowley). 2 = Handloom Weavers (Wood).
3 = Manchester Carpenters (Bowley).

economic conditions of the working class at a period at all remote from our own. Definite wage-rates are usually hard to come by; and, even where these are known, it is impossible to gather directly from them what the real standard of living was. They can, of course, be adjusted to such data as we possess, showing the change in the level of general prices over the period with which we are

dealing. But even a corrected figure, purporting to show real wages, tells us little ; for over long periods there are great changes in the character of consumption and in the necessary expenses which a working-class family has to incur. To take only one obvious instance, the workman of to-day has usually to spend a considerable sum on travelling to and from his work, whereas the workman of a century ago, though in most cases he had ceased to live in his employer's house, generally lived near his work. Moreover, the style, as well as the standard, of living radically changes from generation to generation, so that no exact comparison of the purchasing power of wages at widely different times can be made.

Then, again, rates of wages give, at any time, an inadequate basis for conclusions about the standard of living. Piecework earnings may diverge widely from nominal wages ; unemployment and under-employment may reduce actual earnings far below nominal rates, and, in the days between the decay of the Gilds and the growth of the Trade Unions, there were in many trades no standard rates of wages paid generally to all workers of the same type.

For all these reasons it is necessary to proceed with great caution in making any comparison between the condition of labour during the Industrial Revolution and either an earlier or a later period. The predominantly agricultural civilisation of the earlier eighteenth century had standards and needs essentially different from those of later times. It may be that, if we leave out the period of the Napoleonic wars and the classes of workers whose skill was specially affected by the new machines, the nominal purchasing power of wages actually rose during the black days of the Industrial Revolution. But this does not at all prove that the position of the workers changed for the better. Needs multiplied with the growth of towns and the aggregation of labour into larger units. The auxiliary sources of income on which in the eighteenth century the workman had relied, both to augment his normal wage and to help him out in time of unemployment, were largely swept away. His chance of auxiliary agricultural earnings was lost by enclosure and urbanisation ; his family's industrial earnings vanished with the destruction of the " domestic system." Changes of this character cannot be measured by the recital of mere figures about wages.

Moreover, the most drastic change caused by machinery had little to do with wages. The crying evil of the first half of the nineteenth century was less the low wages than the horrible factory and housing conditions and the inhumanly long working day. The working day not only grew longer, but was also made, under factory conditions, far more intense. Especially in the case of women and children, there was nothing to check remorseless speeding-up throughout a working day in itself intolerably prolonged. And at the end of it the lodging to which the workers returned was usually a stifling and insanitary den, rushed up with no regard for comfort or sanitation to meet the rapid expansion of population in the factory towns.

The facts on all these points are already well known ; and I have no space to rehearse them here. Even where wages were increased, they meant a real lowering of the human standard of life, and a real debasing of the human beings who were subject to their tyranny. The peasant, used to a life in the open air, found himself first thrust out of his village by enclosures and farming improvements which reduced the demand for labour, or by the decline of the domestic industry by which he and his family had lived. Then he found himself thrust into a town and a factory —into unfamiliar and terrifying surroundings which made him feel helpless in the hands of a great and hostile power he could not understand. Sometimes, instinctively, he turned Luddite, and smashed the machine that hurt him. At other times he broke into blind revolt, following any leader who held forth, in language he could understand, a promise of better things. Especially he would follow any leader who, like Cobbett, could speak to him as a fellow-peasant, or, like Owen and O'Connor, in their very different ways, proposed to restore to him the land he had lost and to re-create his independence of the hated machine. Their messages he but half understood, no doubt, but he went on following them until he was tired out, and until new generations had arisen, born to the factory system and accepting it almost as part of the inexorable order of Nature. Then as, for the majority, conditions became gradually a little more tolerable, as wages began to rise, Factory Acts to be passed, employment and prices to be more stable—in short, as the new capitalist conditions became stabilised and the new ruling classes firmly seated in power, the period of

revolts came to an end, and the Golden Age of Capitalism began. This volume carries the story of the Working-class Movement to the threshold of this " Golden Age."

BOOKS

Hammond. Town Labourer.
Bowley. History of Wages in the Nineteenth Century.
Wood. History of Wages in the Cotton Trade.

End of Vol. I.

INDEX

"Abstinence," 180
Agricultural labourers, last revolt, 108 f.
Agricultural methods, 34
Agricultural Revolution, 27 ff.
Agricultural trade unionism, 124, 125
America, war with, 38
American Revolution, 45
Anti-Corn Law League, 157 ff., 162
Applegarth, R., 171
Arbitration Act, Pitt's, 61
Arch, Joseph, 111, 135
Arkwright, R., 32, 33
Artificers, Statute of, 56, 60 f.
Attwood, T., 140, 145, 147, 162

Bank Charter Act, 179
Benbow, W., 97, 117, 149
Benefit Societies, 123
Beniowski, Colonel, 150, 168
Berlin Decrees, 38
Bill of Rights, Society of Supporters of, 44
Binns, J., 50
Birkbeck, Dr. G., 85
Blanketeers, 70
Bonnymuir Riot, 73
Bow Street Runners, 58
Bowley, A. L., 184
Brandreth, J., 71
Braxfield, Lord, 49
Bricklayers' Society, 122
Bright, John, 157
Bristol Riots, 99
Brougham, Lord, 86, 97
Builders, Guild of, Grand National, 120 ff.
Builders' Union, 117, 119 ff., 125, 126
Building contractors, 119
Burdett, Sir F., 65, 97
Burke, E., 45
Bussey, Peter, 150

Canals, 57
Capital, accumulation of, 180 f.
Capitalism, 17
  growth of, 18, 23 ff., 29, 179 ff., 188
Carlile, Richard, 110
Caroline, Queen, 97 f.
Carpenter, W., 137
Carpenters and Joiners, General Union, 91, 119, 122
Cartwright, Major John, 44, 46, 47, 49, 69, 96
Catholic Association, Ireland, 98
Catholic Emancipation, 98, 105
Cato Street Conspiracy, 66, 73
Chadwick, E., 134
Charter, the, 141 f.
Charter Association, National, 161 ff., 171
Chartism, 13, 99, 129, 135–173
Chartist Churches, 162
Chartist Convention, 1839..145 ff.
Chartist Co-operative Land Society, 167
Chartist Petition,
  1839..145
  1842..163
  1848..169 f.
Chartists, Scottish, 153, 162
Child labour, 19, 34, 37, 179
Christian Chartism, 162
Cleave, John, 137, 139
Clothiers, 25
Clothiers' Union, 107, 126 f.
Coal industry, 37
Coal Mining, Friendly Society of, 107
Cobbett, J. M., 146
Cobbett, W., 12, 64, 65, 67, 68 f., 71, 74, 80 f., 96, 97, 107, 110 f., 134, 140, 157, 158 f., 187
Cobden, R., 157
Cochrane, Lord, 167
Colliers' Union, Northumberland and Durham, 91, 107 f., 110
Collins, J., 140, 149, 161 f.
Combination Acts, 51, 56, 59 f., 62, 88 ff., 105, 106
Communist League, 168
Communist Manifesto, 169
Complete Suffrage Movement, 162 f.
Constitutional Information, Society for, 45, 46 ff., 49, 50
Cook, H., 110
Co-operation, Owenite, 68, 79 ff., 112 ff., 123, 124, 165, 182
Co-operative Movement, 13, 15, 129, 165
Co-operative Society, London, 83
Corn Law Movement, 13, 157 ff., 162 f., 165, 166, 177, 178
Corresponding Societies, 44, 46 ff., 49, 50, 56, 58, 66, 178
Corresponding Societies Act, 50, 70, 144
Cotton industry, 30, 57, 61, 181 f.
Cotton spinners, 57, 105 ff., 185
Crisis, the, 124, 127 f.
Cubitts', strike at, 122

Dale, David, 38
Day, Thomas, 45
Debt, National, 26
Democratic Association, London, 141
Derby turn-out, 124 f.

Derbyshire insurrection, 71
Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, Society for, 181
Disraeli, Benjamin, 135, 147
Doherty, J., 97, 105, 117, 124
" Document," the, 121
Domestic system, 29, 33
Dorchester labourers, 125 f.
Duncombe, T. S., 163

Eaton, D. I., 48
Economist, The, 82
Economists, classical, 63, 83, 179
Education, working-class, 86
Edwards, the spy, 73
Emmet, R., 50
Employment of Labour, National Association for, 166
Enclosure Movement, 27 ff., 57
Encyclopædists, 45
Engels, F., 168
Englishmen, United, 50
Evans, T., 66
" Exclusives," the, 121

Factory Reform Movement, 38, 68, 106, 117, 133, 165, 188
Fielden, John, 106, 117, 145, 147
Fox, C. J., 46
Framework knitters, 62 f., 71, 89
French Revolution, 27, 31, 39, 45, 48
  influence in Great Britain, 43 ff., 56, 143
  1830..98
  1848..169
Friendly Societies, 11, 44, 55, 90
Friends of the People, Society of, 46
Frost, John, 150 ff.

Gast, John, 71, 92, 97
General Union, plans for, 71, 92, 106 ff.
Gerrald, J., 48
Gilds, mediæval, 23 ff.
Godwin, W., 46, 65
Gorgon, The, 71
Gray, John, 84
Greek Revolution of 1821..98
Grey, Earl, 98

Habeas Corpus, suspension of, 48, 50, 70
Hammond, J. L. and B., 57
Hampden Clubs, 69, 143
Hanson, J., 121
Hardy, T., 46 ff., 49
Hargreaves, J. 33
Harmony Hall, 166
Harney, G. J., 139, 141, 162
Henson, Gravener, 89
Hepburn, T., 107 f.
Herringsgate, 167
Hetherington, H., 137 ff.
Hodgskin, T., 84 f., 181
Hog's Wash, 48
" Holiday, National," 147, 149
Hone, William, 69
Hume, Joseph, 88, 147
Hunt, Henry, 64, 67, 69, 72, 74, 97, 99, 138
Huskisson, W., 157

Independence, Declaration of, 45
India Trade, 26
Industrial Revolution, 11, 15, 18 ff., 30, 32 ff., 56, 59, 177, 179 ff.
Industrious Classes, National Union of, 114
Industry, Humanity and Knowledge, Consolidated Association of, 128
International Working Men's Association, 171
Internationalism, 14
Irish immigration, 57
Irishmen, United, 47, 50, 178

Jacobinism, 58, 95
Joint-stock companies, 179 f., 181
Jones, Ernest, 168, 171
Jones, W., 152
Journeymen's combinations, 25

Kay, W., 33
Kennington Common meeting, 169
King, Gregory, 30
King, Dr. W., 83, 113

Labour Exchanges, 113 ff.
Labour notes, 116
Land Company, National, 167 f.
Leeds, etc., District Union, 107, 126
Liberalism, 13, 157 f.
Liberty and Property, Society for Preserving, 47
Limited liability, 180
Loveless, the brothers, 125, 145
Lovett, W., 83, 112, 137, 145, 147, 149, 159, 161 ff., 166, 172
Luddites, 12, 62 f., 65, 71, 89, 97, 187

Macaulay, Lord, 163
Macdonald, Alexander, 171
McCulloch, J. R., 88
Machine-breaking, 16, 62 f.
Malthus, T. R., 37, 135
Margarot, M., 48
Marx, Karl, 168, 169, 171
" Mass Movement," the, 171
Mazzini, Giuseppe, 168
Mechanics' Institutes, 85
Melbourne, Lord, 110, 126, 146
Metropolitan Trades Committee, 92, 108
Middle Ages, 17, 23
Miners, 57, 107
Miners' strike, 1810..61
Minimum wage agitation, 61
Moore, Peter, 89
More, Hannah, 86
Morrison, James, 119 f., 127 f.
Mudie, G., 82
Muir, T., 48

Napier, Sir Charles, 145
Napoleon III., 169

Napoleonic Wars. *See* Wars.
Negro slavery, 180
Newcomen, T. 33
New Harmony, 82
New Lanark, 38
New Moral World, the, 128
Newport rising, 150 ff.
" Ninety-Eight," the, 50
Nore, mutiny at, 50
Norfolk, labourers' movement in, 51
Northern Star, the, 140, 153, 161, 166, 169

Oastler, Richard, 106, 135, 139
O'Brien, Bronterre, 137 f., 141, 148, 159, 162
O'Brien, Smith, 169
O'Connell, Daniel, 98, 140
O'Connor, Feargus, 139 ff., 148, 151, 153, 159, 161 ff., 165 ff., 171, 172, 178, 187
O'Connorville, 167
O'Neill, 162
Oddfellows, 55
Oliver the spy, 70, 71
Orders in Council, 38
Owen, Robert, 68, 79 ff., 84, 119 ff., 139, 143, 159, 165, 181, 187
Owenism, 12, 112 ff., 120 ff., 129, 166

Paine, T., 45, 46, 48, 96, 178
Palmer, T., 48
Parish apprentices, 37
Peel, Sir R., the elder, 38; the younger, 165, 177
Peterloo massacre, 72
" Philanthropic Hercules," 71
Pioneer, the, 119, 127 f.
Pitt, W., 58
Place, Francis, 50, 84 f., 88 ff., 139, 141, 146, 159, 184
" Plug Plot," 163 f.
Plumbers' Society, 122
Police, 59
Political and Social Improvement, Association for Promoting, 161
Political unions, 97, 99, 138
Political Union, Birmingham, 140, 141, 144, 162
Poor Laws, 36, 38, 68, 109, 133
Poor Laws of 1834..37, 133 ff., 139, 144
Poor Man's Guardian, the, 138
Population, 19, 35 ff., 135
Potters' Union, 107, 126
Preston, T., 66, 69
Price, R., 44, 45
Priestley, J., 44, 51
Printers, London, 59
Printers, *The Times*, 60
Protection of Labour, National Association for, 106 ff.
Protection of Labour, National Association of United Trades for, 165 f.
Puritans, 25

Queenwood, 166, 167

" Ravenstone, Piercy," 84
Reeves, John, 47
Reform agitation, 12, 27, 44 ff., 70, 74, 94 ff., 137
Reform Bills, 1830..2, 98 ff.
Reform, " economical," 44
Regeneration Society, National, 117
Reformation, 25
Relief of Poor, National Association for, 67
Religion, Socialist attitude to, 82
Republicanism, 43
Revolution of 1688..26, 43
Revolution Society, 52
Rights of Man, The, 45, 46
Rights of Man, Declaration of, 45
Robertson, J. C., 85
Rochdale Pioneers, 165
Roebuck, J. A., 141
Russell, Lord John, 137, 147, 170

" Sacred Month," 147, 149
Scottish reformers, 47, 48
Secrecy, Committee of, 1794...49
Secrecy, Committee of, 1817...69
Secularism, 129
Senior, N. W., 180
Sherwin, W., 69
Shipping, 26
Shipwrights, London, 91
Six Acts, 72 f.
Skirving, 48
Smith, J. E., 124, 127 f.
Socialism, modern, 12, 13, 15, 158
Socialism, rise of, 65 ff., 79 ff., 112 ff.
South Sea Bubble, 26
Spanish Revolution, 1820..98
Special constables, 59
Speenhamland system, 36, 109
Spence, Thomas, 65 f.
Spencean Philanthropists, Society of, 66, 69, 79
Spies, Government, 47, 58
Spinners, Grand General Union, 105 f., 126 f.
Spitalfields Acts, 60
Spithead, mutiny at, 50
Steam Engine Makers' Society, 91
Steam Engine Makers, Journeymen, 91
Stephens, J. R., 135, 139 f., 149
Stephenson, R., 32
Stonemasons' Society, 122
Sturge, Joseph, 162

Taylor, Dr. J., 150, 153
Ten Hours Act, 1847..165
Ten Hours Movement. *See* Factory Reform.
Thelwall, J., 49
Thistlewood, A., 66, 69, 70, 73
Thompson, W., 82, 84 f., 181
Tolpuddle, 125
Tooke, J. Horne, 46, 47, 49
Towns, growth of, 36 f.
Trade Union Acts, 1824–25..91
Trade Unionism, rise of, 81, 88 ff., 105 ff.

Trade Unions, before Industrial Revolution, 11, 18, 55, 58
Trade Unions, modern, 13, 15, 178
Trades Councils, 90
Trades Union, Grand National Consolidated, 123 ff.
Official Gazette, 128

Unemployment, 30, 33, 39, 71, 186
Union shops, 116, 120, 123, 124, 129, 166
Unitarians, 44
Utilitarianism, 85, 97

Value, Labour theory of, 84, 116
Vincent, Henry, 139, 149, 152
Volunteers, Pitt's, 58

Wage Bills, 61
Wage laws, Tudor, 56, 60 f.
Wages, in early nineteenth century, 181 ff.
Wages, iron law of, 89
War of 1914–18..14
Wars, Napoleonic, 31, 34, 38, 44, 48, 57, 63 f., 66 f.
slump following, 67, 71
Water power, 34
Watson, James, 112, 137
Watsons, the, 66, 69
Watt, James, 32, 33
Watt, Robert, 49, 57
Weavers, hand-loom, 57, 61, 184 f.
Weavers, Scottish, 61 f.
Wellington, Duke of, 99, 169
Welsh, E., 121
Westminster elections, 94
White, G., 89
Wilberforce, W., 179
Wilkes, John, 44
Williams, Zephaniah, 152
Wollstonecraft, Mary, 46
Women in Trade Unions, 124
Women's labour, 34
Women's suffrage, 142
Wood, G. H., 182
Wool industry, 27, 29, 30, 55, 61
Wooller, T. J., 69
Working Classes, National Union of, 100, 108, 137, 138
Working Men's Association, London, 139 ff.
Wyvill, C., 44

Yeomanry, 58, 72

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